STOURBRIDGE
thechronicle
DECEMBER 9, 2010
15p when sold

Sell-out show to raise money to dance venue
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Two cracking weekends coming up at centre
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Glass artist Malcolm to sculpture piece for royal wedding
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Players to scrum down in memory of late coach

A RUGBY match being held in tribute to a former coach is taking place in Stourbridge on Saturday.

Harry Jeavons-Fellows died in 2005 while on his way to hospital for a check-up after undergoing surgery for an Achilles tendon injury.

The 39-year-old had played rugby for Stourbridge RFC and at the time of his death was coach of the club's under-14 team.

This Saturday's game will see The Original Harryers – a team comprising players coached by Harry in the under-14 ranks, take on the current Stourbridge fourth team, The Grasshoppers. Also being remembered on the day will be Martin Phillips, the club's former fitness coach who died six months after Harry. A two-minute silence will be held in memory of the pair.

Harryers team member and current under-14s coach at Stourbridge, Sean Firth, said: "Since Harry died the team has never really been the same.

"It hit everyone really hard and lots of people left the club or just stopped playing rugby altogether. This will be the first time that we'll all be playing together for quite a while. Hopefully we can raise lots of money and have a really good time."

All funds raised from the afternoon will go to charity, namely Macmillan Cancer Support.

Following the match, which kicks off at 3pm, a raffle and player auction will be held as well as other entertainment.

Entry is £3 on the door while children under five get in free.

Call the club on 01384 395000 for more details.

SHOPS FEARS OVER SAFETY

Peter Allen at one of the disabled access points

Traders in Stourbridge town centre have joined forces to campaign over health and safety issues they say are blighting the High Street.

The new Stourbridge Town Association of Retailers – or STAR – was formed after concerns following the Stourbridge Christmas festival. Peter Allen, who owns Stephen Allen Menswear, is leading the group.

He spotted electrical cables lying across the pavement in puddles and stalls set up in front of dipped curbs meant for use by the disabled.

"Disabled people couldn't even get on the pavement which is terrible," said Mr Allen, who lives in Clent.

"One of the disabled access points was completely blocked, while another two had something in the way. One had wires going across it – it was just very dangerous.

"People like the market and that's fine, it's good to get people into the town, but it should be done properly and not just abandon basic health and safety rules because it's Christmas.

"We want to make people aware of the problems and ensure it doesn't cause havoc like that again."

The Christmas festival on Saturday saw hundreds of people brave the cold and damp to browse stalls, go on children's rides and watch children's TV favourites Dora the Explorer and Go, Diego, Go turn on the town's Christmas lights display.

Mr Allen said other issues the group planned to raise with the council included hanging baskets dripping on shoppers.

Council spokesman Phil Parker said the council would take measures to ensure the problem did not happen in future.

"We are aware that a dropped kerb was blocked by a stall at the Christmas festival and while we will ensure this is not the case in the future we did not receive any reports of anyone having difficulties with access," he said.

"We did receive many compliments."

■ Festival pictures – Page 17

MP highlights cost of policing revellers

IT costs an extra £100,000 a year on top of normal policing costs to police revellers in Stourbridge on Friday and Saturday nights, the town's MP claims.

Margot James is researching the cost of binge-drinking to the nation. And she said: "I believe it is going to be millions."

The Conservative MP raised the issue during Home Office Questions.

She revealed the cost of binge-drinking in Stourbridge on weekend nights and asked Home Office minister James Brokenshire what plans the department had to protect the taxpayer from footing the bill for alcohol-related crime. The MP has been inundated with complaints from constituents.

Last week, Home Secretary Theresa May unveiled measures including giving councils powers to charge pubs and clubs that stay open late a fee to pay for the cost of extra policing.

Mr Brokenshire said: "It will be for local authorities to decide how best to use that power."

Miss James said afterwards: "I feel that alcohol contributes to far too much crime and use of resources – such as the ambulances and A&E – and I am trying to build up a picture of what this is costing."

Swinging into charity event

A CHRISTMAS tree of light and carol service evening at Hagley Golf and Country Club will raise money for the captain's charities on Monday.

Guests are invited to sponsor a light on the tree with all money going to Phoenix House in Stourbridge, Breast Cancer UK and the Coeliac Society.

Social chairman Mark Ralph said: "All are welcome to come on down for the festivities. We have a five-piece brass band, mince-pies, mulled wine and lanterns for the children to light – with every penny raised off to good causes in time for Christmas."

Admission is free and a fish and chip supper will be available for £5.

Gates at the Wassell Grove Lane Club open at 7.30 pm to 9.30pm; with guests welcome inside and out.

Call the club 01562 883701 for further details.

Candlelight invite

STOURBRIDGE residents are invited to join in candlelight Christingle celebrations at Holy Trinity Church this Sunday. The service starts at 4.30pm and will include singing, readings and teachings for children about the history of Christingle.

Acorns' head of retail Janice McPherson, Santa, Arlya Welch eight, and Mayor and Mayoress of Dudley, Peter and Hillary Miller at the opening

Mayor opens the latest shop for hospice charity

THE Mayor of Dudley Councillor Peter Miller was on hand to cut the ribbon of the newest Acorn Children's Hospice shop, after naming the cause his charity for the year.

Councillor Miller and his wife Hillary joined Acorns workers for the official opening of the shop in Stourbridge High Street on Saturday.

The shop has its own children's section with books and toys, as well as offering clothing, adult books, and household items.

Acorns retail area manager Lindy Welch was there with her eight-year-old daughter Arlya. She said: "We're very excited to have opened this fantastic new store in Stourbridge.

"Acorns does vital work in looking after local life-limited children, and our shops enjoy great support."

Head of retail Janice McPherson added that the shop needed donations of unwanted goods, as well as volunteers to run it. "We depend on people to help by giving us their unwanted items, but also their time and expertise," she said.

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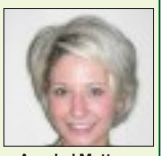

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No panic as assaults on hospital staff rise 33pc

ASSAULTS on staff working at the trust that runs Rowley Regis Hospital and Sandwell Hospital have risen by 33 per cent in the last year.

The annual statistics which have been released by Sandwell & West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust reveal there were 157 assaults in 2009-10, up from 118 the year before. At Dudley, the annual figure was 53.

In Sandwell, security bosses have attributed the rise to better reporting from staff as opposed to an actual rise in assaults.

Of the 157 assaults reported at Rowley Regis, Sandwell, and City hospitals, 70 involved medical factors, including people lashing out after waking up from an anaesthetic or people with conditions such as dementia.

Paula Clark, chief executive of the Dudley Group of Hospitals NHS Trust, which runs Russells Hall Hospital, said there was now CCTV and 24 hour security.

"The Dudley Group of Hospitals takes a zero tolerance approach to violence and aggression and we encourage staff to report any incidents that occur.

"During 2009/10 the trust reported a total of 53 physical assaults against our staff, 38 of which were by patients who were confused at the time.

"While we understand that sometimes aggression is driven by fear or confusion we believe violence towards our staff, who are here to help, is unacceptable.

Aggressive

"In order to provide a safe environment for employees, patients, visitors and others we have CCTV cameras monitored 24 hours a day, as well as a responsive 24-hour manned security service to deal with disorder on our sites.

Ms Clark added: "Front line staff receive mandatory conflict resolution training."

In May 2010, Russells Hall Hospital launched the first "hospital watch scheme" in partnership with police to encourage staff, patients and visitors to be more alert and to report incidents.

Peter Finch, security adviser and security management specialist at Sandwell & West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust said: "Our assault numbers have gone up because people are reporting more."

Students in zoo fundraiser

FOREIGN affairs students from Meadow Sports College in Oldbury visited Dudley Zoo to hand over funds they had collected as part of a citizenship project. They raised £52.30 from a raffle, sales of cake and jams and proceeds from a bric-a-brac stall. Dudley Zoo's head of media and communications, Jill Hitchman, said: "The donation was a complete surprise and very much appreciated."

Stay away EDL says Tory chief

THE chairman of the Tory party has said the Black Country should tell the far right English Defence League to keep well away.

Baroness Warsi said their protests put unnecessary pressure on police.

The peer, on a visit to the West Midlands, said the EDL targeted the Black Country to "stir up resentment that isn't there" between Muslims and other people, and claimed that the debate over the Dudley mosque plan had been used to "put forward an aggressive and divisive agenda".

Around 100 EDL protestors turned up in Wolverhampton city centre on November 20 despite having not gone through the appropriate channels of informing the police. There have also been protests in Dudley.

Baroness Warsi added: "The BNP did not do well electorally but there are other groups that are putting forward an aggressive and divisive agenda."

Surprise party as Len retires

Headteacher Adrian Pembleton (centre), with retiring caretaker Len Coley and his wife Di, who also retired recently after years of service as a lunchtime supervisor and cleaner

"IRREPLACEABLE" school caretaker Len Coley has locked up for the last time after more than 25 years – and was treated to a party by staff and pupils.

Mr Coley, aged 65, bid a fond farewell to Caslon Primary School, Halesowen, where he has worked since 1984.

But staff and pupils were not going to let the much-loved caretaker go without saying a very special goodbye.

Youngsters made him cards wishing him a happy retirement and a cake was baked in his honour.

The school also organised a surprise party attended by current and former members of staff.

His retirement comes three months after that of his wife, 61-year-old Diane Coley, who worked at the school as a cleaner.

They plan to spend their retirement by indulging their passion for walkingand spending time with four-year-old grand-daughter Grace.

Mr Coley, of Meres Road, said he planned stay active by taking volunteering work Dudley Council.

JB's fate in balance after deal is denied

MYSTERY surrounds the future of troubled Dudley rock club JB's as administrators denied a company's claims it now owns the music venue.

JB's was placed into administration in October with debts of £450,000. The business, including the premises in Castle Hill, was subsequently put on the market for £350,000.

A company calling itself London Entertainments set up a Facebook page advertising itself as the new owners of JB's.

The website's creator Kay Rai has posted a link for more information to the London Entertainments website. It carries a statement claiming it has bought a 1,000 capacity club and suggests JB's will be renamed Monroes.

Administrator John Travers, of Stourbridge-based John D Travers & Co, today said: "I can categorically state that the sale of JB's has not been concluded.

"Anyone who claims to have purchased the club is mistaken."

He added that he was in "advanced negotiations" with a potential buyer.

"Things are moving slower than I had hoped, but we are still hopeful of a successful outcome," he said.

The London Entertainments website states: "London Entertainments has recently acquired the huge 1,000 capacity nightclub, 'Monroes' – Pride of The Black Country. We have purchased this club."

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Trojan bus to target the stone-throwing vandals

A "TROJAN" bus with reinforced windows which carries plainclothes police officers is being developed to clamp down on yobs throwing stones and snowballs at vehicles in the West Midlands.

Bus operator National Express announced the plan after bus windows were broken in five attacks in a week in Sedgley alone. It will operate on routes where buses have come under attack across the region and will take to the roads early next year.

National Express will launch the bus following the success of similar schemes in other parts of the country.

Drivers have been warned to be extra vigilant when driving through Sedgley, where yobs have attacked buses on the 558 route between Wolverhampton and Dudley, with High Street and the Bull Ring being hotspots.

There have been five incidents in a week. No passengers or staff have been injured, and an investigation has been launched by West Midlands Police.

Detectives and National Express officials are looking through CCTV images to find those responsible for the attacks.

Safer travel manager for the transport company, Tony Dallison, said the Trojan bus scheme was designed to target those who smashed windows.

Instantly

"We take anti-social behaviour very seriously and are developing this bus scheme," he said.

"A Trojan bus is a vehicle with reinforced windows and plainclothes officers inside. As soon as the officers spot stone or other projectile throwing they can get off the vehicle and apprehend those responsible instantly."

Area manager John Morrow said: "Safety remains our absolute priority. We will remain in close contact with police officers to share any CCTV images."

Music, laughter and magic

A NIGHT of song, dance and comedy is being held to raise cash for a Black Country charity.

Proceeds from the variety show at Brierley Hill Civic Hall on Thursday, January 27, will go to the Geoff Hill Charitable Trust which gives grants to groups and charities. Comic Lee Wilson, magician John Milner and popular songtress Maggie O'Hara are among those taking part. Tickets at £8 to £10 are available from 01384 812812 or online at **dudley.gov.uk**

Christmas crafts at new arts base

A NEW arts centre is offering arts and crafts workshops this month.

Artspace Brierley Hill opened in an empty shop in October and is being run by Dudley Arts Council. It follows the success of Artspace in Dudley which finished earlier this year.

Workshops are provided by Dudley Council's adult and community learning and include an introduction to watercolours, creative art, upholstery, jewellery making and family Christmas crafts.

An art gallery will also be featured as part of the new venue and will display work by local artists including Dudley's Visual Arts Network.

Artspace Brierley Hill is a 12 month project and will run workshops until September 2011. For information call in at Artspace, 8, Maple Row, Mill Street, Brierley Hill, or call Anna Fusco on 01384 816587.

Choir raises the roof for charity

Bob Biggs with the Gentlemen Songsters Male Voice Choir

A MALE voice choir will be helping to raise the roof with festive melodies to celebrate raising charity cash at a concert in Dudley Concert Hall this Sunday.

The Gentlemen Songsters Male Voice Choir, based at Wall Heath, will be joined by Phoenix West Midlands Brass Band and youngsters from Cotwall End Primary School, Sedgley

TV presenter Michael Collie will be the compere for the evening.

The choir will also be presenting cheques to its chosen charities – the Georg-ina Ward at Russells Hall Hospital, the Rainbow Breast Reconstruction Group, and the St Thomas Community Network.

The concert starts at 7.30pm, and tickets priced £8 are available from 01384 838863 or Dudley Council Plus on 01384 812812.

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Invitation to former Round Oak workers

FORMER workers at Brierley Hill's landmark Round Oak Steelworks can reminisce at a reunion t his weekend.

Saturday's event run by organised by Dudley Council at Dudley Museum & Art Gallery will be a celebration of the Black Country's industrial past and has been called Round Oak Remembered.

Anyone who worked at Round Oak before it closed in 1982 can attend,and the event will include an exhibition of paintings, film from the 1960s film as well as photographs, historical documents and memorabilia.

Visitors will also see designs for a proposed memorial to be erected opposite the former works entrance near Waterfront Way.

Councillor David Stanley, cabinet member for environment and culture, said: "There is so much history to the Round Oak Steelworks and the generations of families who worked there.

"This event is about celebrating the work and the impact on the Dudley borough as well as giving workers the chance to catch up," added the councillor. The steelworks were founded by Lord Ward, later the Earl of Dudley, in 1857 as an outlet for pig iron made in nearby blast furnaces.

It closed in December 1982 and brought high levels of unemployment to the area. But Black Country tycoon twins Roy and Don Richardson brought cash and jobs flooding back to Brierley Hill.

They built the Waterfront office and leisure complex on the old site of Round Oak, while the Merry Hill shopping centre went up a stone's throw away on what was once farmland

The reunion will start at 11.30am, sponsored by Tata Steel Distribution Round Oak Rail which still occupies a part of the site.

Former Round Oak workers are asked to call 01384 815575 to confirm whether they can attend the reunion.

Parking is available in Priory Road. Guests will also have an opportunity to see the 80th anniversary exhibition of the Dudley Society of Artists.

Dancers step up fundraising

The dance group at KIDS Orchard Centre, Lye, ahead of their fundraiser

YOUNG dance stars and aspiring actors have joined forces to stage a fundraising Christmas show to help save the centre where they practice.

Children from the KIDS Orchard Centre on the Lye by-pass have been working hard and rehearsing for weeks to come up with dance routines and a Christmas-themed play for the show, which will be held at the Royal British Legion Club, Amblecote, on December 17. All 125 tickets have now been snapped up.

Senior co-ordinator Anna Billingham, aged 26, from Halesowen, said both the Let's Dance Juniors and Seniors groups would perform on the night. The juniors will perform Jingle Bell Rock, while the seniors will perform Rocking Around the Christmas Tree, all dressed up in rock 'n' roll style clothes.

Then they will all join up to sing All In This Together from High School Musical.

"We also have a disabled drama group, who have written their own Christmas play and will be staging that on the night as wel," Anna said

The money will go towards helping support the centre, which will lose £80,000 when Dudley Council withdraws its Area Based Grant in 2011.

MPs top £16,000 in claims

DUDLEY'S MPs claimed more than £16,000 expenses in the first three and a half months of this Parliament .

Stourbridge MP Margot James claimed £353; Dudley South MP Chris Kelly, £4,857; Dudley North MP Ian Austin, £832 and Halesowen and Rowley Regis MP James Morris, £10,399 between May 7 and August 31.

The first set of MPs' expenses under the new rules revealed they were paid £3.1million – even though for much of the time it was the holiday season.

Some 22,000 claims of 576 MPs were disclosed - indicating that 74 were not paid because their claims were either rejected, submitted incorrectly, or they chose not to claim during the recess.

Details of claims including second home, travel, and staff costs were unveiled by the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority.

Terror for family in car as gang throws bricks

Jamie Mason with the brick hurled through the car window

YOBS hurled house bricks at a mother and her two young children outside a Dudley community centre.

One missile smashed through their car window, narrowly missing their heads, as they tried to flee by driving away from the scene in Kingswinford.

Hundreds of pounds' damage was caused to the vehicle during the terrifying attack which left the family shaken.

Travel agency worker Lindsey Mason, aged 41, was with sons Jake, aged seven, and six-year-old Alex outside the Dingle Community Centre, in Madeley Road.

West Midlands Police said they had now stepped up patrols in the area to reassure families following the unprovoked attack at 6.30pm on Thursday, Nov-ember 25.

It happened as the family was leaving the centre, when a group of youths started laughing and throwing stones at them.

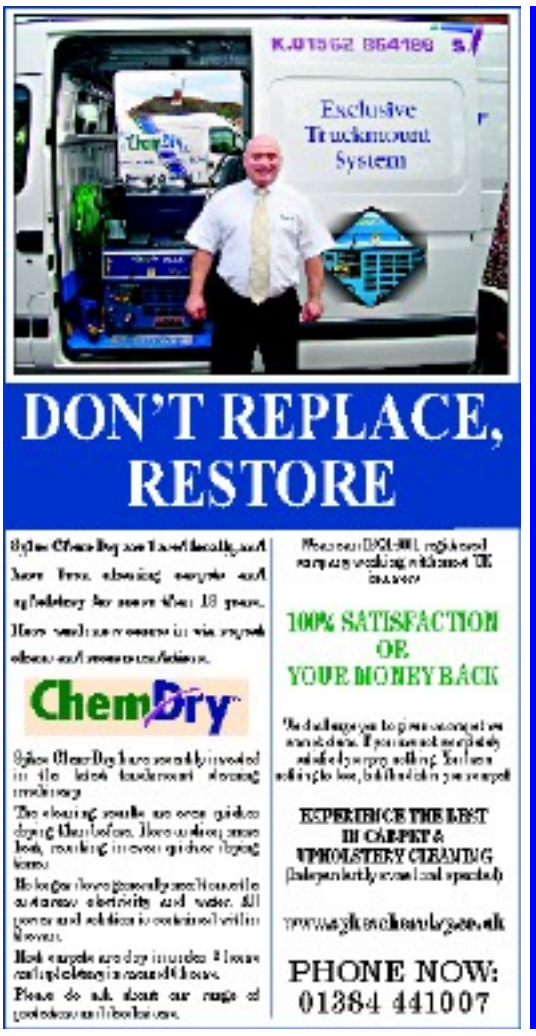
In panic, Mrs Mason thrust her children into the back of the Renault Clio and tried to drive off.

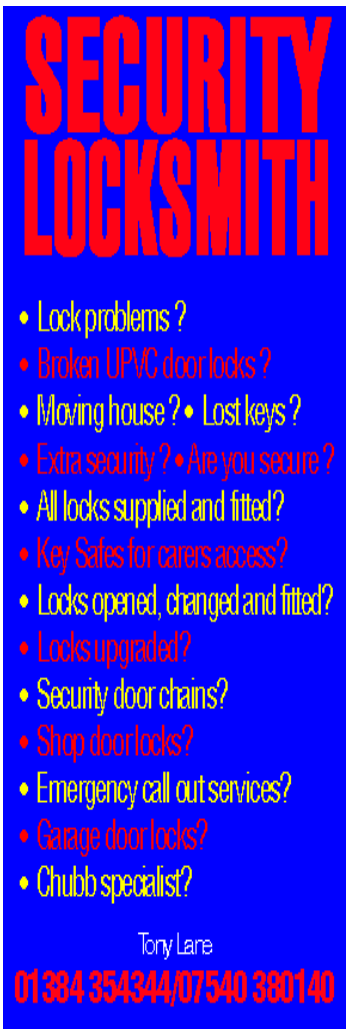
But the yobs kept laughing before throwing a brick through the driver's side rear window, showering the family with glass.

"The kids were screaming and I didn't know what to do," Mrs Mason said.

Mrs Mason's husband Jamie, aged 34, is offering a £500 reward for information leading to a conviction of the offenders.

Phone police on 0345 113 5000 to help.





Church workers showing socks appeal

A CHRISTIAN group is calling on Dudley residents to donate generously to their first Christmas Stocking Appeal.

Volunteers Jeanette and Malcolm Jones and Graham Bishop from Dudley Christian Fellowship launched the appeal a couple of weeks ago. It will see socks given to homeless people in time for Christmas.

In addition to new socks, the dedicated volunteers are also appealing for gifts of new hats, scarves and gloves to be given out during the winter months.

The charity helps homeless people throughout the year with their weekly Heaven's Kitchen initiative, which sees hot meals cooked up at their Salop Street base.

Following meals, guests are given a packed lunch to take away and are offered clean clothes and a fresh pair of socks.

Need

Heaven's Kitchen started in 2007 when volunteers took to the streets with hot soup and sleeping bags to see if there was a need for a homeless support service in Dudley. They have since served more than 3,000 three-course meals to local people in need.

Volunteer Malcolm Jones said: "In addition to a hot meal, clean warm socks can make a world of difference to a homeless person who can be out in all weathers.

"We hope that our appeal will keep us in socks not only during the winter months but all year round.

"This would mean that we can spend cash donations on sleeping bags and other necessities to help to get people back on their feet."

Donations or cheques payable to Dudley Christian Fellowship and marked for the attention of Heaven's Kitchen can be dropped into Dudley Counselling Centre.

They're based at the Dudley Christian Fellowship, Salop Street, Dudley DY3 4AT.

Alternatively call 01384 239222 for more information.

Volunteers from Dudley Christian Fellowship, Malcolm and Jeanette Jones, launch their first Christmas sock appeal at the groups centre in Salop Street

Cheers! Pub gets new boss at the bar

AN ABANDONED Black Country pub, which has been closed for three years, has re-opened its doors to the public following a seven-month refurbishment project.

New owner Louise Carroll, aged 39, bought the derelict Old Bush Revived pub, in Powke Lane, Blackheath, in April and has now transformed it to create a new, two-room pub.

It used to have three rooms downstairs, but a wall was removed, a new colour scheme installed, new doors fitted and the kitchen extended in preparation for its opening night on Friday.

Aiming

Louise has also taken on six new full-time and part-time staff and is confident the pub is now entering a successful new era. "I am bringing the traditional, welcoming pub back into Blackheath," she said.

"We are aiming to give people good beer, good food, and a great atmosphere."

Louise, who previously ran The Fountain Inn in Tipton for 10 years, decided to buy the Old Bush Revived because she wanted to progress from being a leaseholder to outright owner.

But she added that she was also keen to move back into the area where she was born.

She grew up in the now defunct Grange pub in Hanover Road, only one mile from her new location, and said it was "fantastic" to be back.

No bites on plans to make fish lake

PLANS to build a fishing lake in a Halesowen wildlife haven have failed to reel in the approval of planners.

Developers wanted to transform land behind Hayley Green Farm, off Hagley Road, but came up against stiff opposition from locals.

The plans, which also included a building, were rejected by Dudley Council officials after several letters of objection were received, and the resulting appeal dismissed.

Councillor Ken Turner, who represents Hayley Green and Cradley South, is glad the proposal has been rejected.

He said: "I'm very pleased the consideration of the residents has been taken into account, and we can keep our green belt area."

The plans were rejected after concerns over the effect it would have on local wildlife. The land is the environment for many protected species, including badgers and otters.

The entrance to the proposed lake was also a cause for concern as the nearby Fox Hunt Island poses a hazard for pedestrians.

A council spokesman said: "The application was refused on grounds of the impact a new building could have on the greenbelt, and also as no protected species survey had been included in the application."

Council loses its power over plan

GOVERNMENT Inspectors have stepped in to settle a row over plans for a housing development at a beauty spot near Stourbridge after local councillors were accused of taking too long to deal with the application.

The scheme to build 10 low-cost homes in The Pleck, a wooded area of Clent, has been met with anger from residents, who claim the area will be "ruined".

Protest

Bromsgrove District Council's planning committee voted to refuse planning permission at a meeting yesterday.

But the council no longer has power to enforce a decision because of claims it took too long to process the application.

The Planning Inspectorate in Bristol will decide whether to grant planning permission but campaigners fear a go-ahead as the inspectorate may not be aware of local issues and concerns.

Plans, submitted by Clent Parish Council and West Mercia Housing Association, led to a Save the Pleck protest group being set up.

Applicants appealed to the inspectorate that the district council had not dealt with the proposals within six months. The inspectorate agreed to take responsibility for the decision – so the planning committee was left powerless this week.

Clent MP Sajid Javid said: "I want the planning inspectorate to respect the strength of local opinion in Clent.

"Planning decisions should be made locally, not by bureaucrats in Bristol or Whitehall."

Two and three-bedroom homes are intended to help young families take a first step on the property ladder.

Woodland of about 1,000 sq ft, is home to wildlife including badgers, hedgehogs, bats and owls, say residents.

People are also worried nearby Holy Cross Lane is too narrow for extra cars.

Refused

Caroline Howard, aged 45, of Holy Cross Lane, said: "We are concerned about the decision that will be made in Bristol but we are confident there is enough evidence to show the plans are not suitable."

A report to the planning committee recommended the application be refused.

It said: "The proposed development would result in the loss of an area of woodland which is considered to make an important contribution to the character and appearance of the Holy Cross Conservation Area."

Cracker weekends

Ruskin Glass Centre manager Leigh White prepares for the festive events

PLENTY of festive fun is on offer at Stourbridge's Ruskin Glass Centre where visitors can make their own tree decorations. The attraction, which recently underwent a £1.4million refurbishment is running Christmas Cracker weekends on December 11, 12, 18 and 19. There will be glass blowing and sand blasting demonstrations as well as craft activities. Festive treats will also be on offer in the cafe. The venue is also hosting its own Choir Idol competition during the events, which run from 10am to 4pm.

Centre manager Leigh White said: "There will be plenty to see and do while enjoying the festive atmosphere. People can have a go at making their own tree decorations."

For further details contact the centre in Wollaston Road, Amblecote, on 01384 399419.

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Snow joke on the road

Bitter weather gives RAC its busiest day for the last 17 years

The RAC has just tackled its busiest day in 17 years.

CATHY SPENCER went out with one of the patrols to find out about the challenges facing motorists during the cold snap.

Brett Hunt, RAC leading patrol, is called to the assistance of stranded Chrissy Dale

Brett is 'my hero' says Chrissy as the car starts

FOR Chrissy Dale, it really was the last thing she needed. Her eight-month-old daughter was in the car ready for nursery, and the 29-year-old was prepared to tackle the slippery, snow-covered roads – only to discover her vehicle wouldn't start.

Sunday, November 28 saw the RAC's busiest day in 17 years with further cold weather predicted.

Brett Hunt has been a leading patrolman for nine years. As well as driving around in one of the familiar-looking orange vans, he looks after a team of 11 drivers.

The father of two says one of the most common causes of breakdowns in cold weather is battery problems.

"Cold weather affects the performance of the battery," says Brett, aged 44.

"Oil is thicker than it is in warmer weather and the moving parts are tighter so it takes more effort to get things moving – this combined with a tired battery is not good."

Brett's first two calls of the day are to flat batteries in Kingswinford and Oldbury – and then the RAC control centre at Walsall receives a call from Chrissy Dale.

Through his computer, Brett tells the centre he is available to take a call-out.

His next job soon arrives down the phone line and shows up on the skeye.pad that he has near to his sat-nav on the dashboard.

It tells him he has to head to Attingham Drive in Dudley, where a non-starting car and Chrissy will be waiting for him.

"I put the location in my sat-nav and it gives me an estimated time of arrival," says Brett, who lives in Netherton and is married to housewife Debbie. Then I give the motorist a call to tell them that I'm on my way, which is worth a lot to them."

At Attingham Drive, Chrissy Dale is waiting with her 10-year-old blue Peugeot 106. She says: "I had my baby Poppy ready for nursery and then the car wouldn't start.

"I thought, if this is what it is like at the start of the cold weather, what's it going to be like for the rest of winter?

"I was so relieved when Brett called to say he was only 15 minutes away. Today he is my hero."

After doing a few checks, Brett saw the battery was measuring only 175amps when it should be around 370amps.

He told Chrissy she would need a new one, and that he could fit one for her the same day.

Brett sent information via his skeye.pad to the control centre punching in a number of codes: 139 means the battery is flat, 78 the battery has been condemned by a tester, and 85 is that he jump-started the car.

"We also give feedback to the control centre about the information we received from them and whether it was correct," he says.

"Sometimes people break down in a road and they have no idea where they are, and so it can be difficult to locate them."

RAC drivers generally work 40 hours' a week, but often do overtime. Brett says this is popular with younger workers who want to save for a deposit on a house.

His next call-out is to Queens Road in Sedgley where builder Lee Avey is waiting for him with his 28-year-old Peugeot 205, which he has managed to get started.

Lee, 30, says: "As a builder I haven't got a clue about cars, so when it wouldn't start this morning, I knew I would have to call out the RAC.

"I've only had the car a few months but now I'm starting to regret buying it as sometimes it cuts out when I'm driving around a corner, although it is a classic and lovely to drive."

Brett checks the connections in the car and recommends to Lee that he has the gas analysers checked at a garage.

"I used to cover the Oldbury and West Bromwich area but now its Dudley, Stourbridge, Halesowen and Kidderminster," says Brett who has two children, Jade, 19, and Shane, 21.

"Last January we had a 4x4 vehicle which we used for pulling cars out of places like bogs and ditches.

"In cold weather people can panic when their wheels start to spin and they really give it some revs. The best thing to do is to let the vehicle do its own thing and tick over."

His next job is five minutes away at Bilston Street in Sedgley where Nasrin Rezai has called saying her black Nissan Navara has broken down.

When we arrive, Nasrin is not with her car – she has walked in the snow back to the warmth of her home.

Brett says: "People can often go to someone's house or a shop to keep warm, but it means we are left sitting on the roadside waiting for them.

"We give them a certain amount of time to return to their vehicle and then we just have to leave as there are usually other people waiting for us."

After 10 minutes Nasrin, 35, who lives in Clifton Street, arrives at the vehicle. She says: "I dropped my two children off at school and when I got back to my car, it wouldn't start.

"When I called the RAC they told me it could be up to three hours so I decided to walk back home rather than stay with my car. However, it was only 15 minutes later that Brett called to stay he was on his way."

After checking, Brett discovers that the car battery is fine and it is the alternator that needs replacing.

"I was so relieved when Brett arrived – as I was walking to the car I could see the flashing lights," says Nasrin.

"When the weather is so cold the last thing you want to be is stranded, so it is good to know you can call the RAC out to get you moving again."

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Pass the parcel record bid

DUDLEY has been chosen to take part in a Guinness World Record for the largest ever pass the parcel game.

A giant parcel the size of a small car will make its way through Dudley in December, as part of a tour of 10 towns or cities across the UK.

The other locations involved in the attempt are Aberaeron, Edinburgh, Kendal, Leeds, Littlehampton, Liverpool, Manchester and Reading.

Adventure

The parcel will contain thousands of pounds worth of toys, which will be given away over the course of Woolies' World Record Breaking Pass the Parcel Christmas Adventure.

Small gifts will also be given to the first 100 people who go along and the lucky town which peels off the last layer of the parcel is promised a "celebrity surprise".

The date the parcel will be in Dudley has not yet been revealed.

To follow the tour, visit the **www.facebook.com/woolworthsuk** website.

Faith theme for Mothers Union

HAGLEY Mothers' Union members are due to hear June Young, Dudley South's deanery leader, talk on "Faith in Action" at their meeting on January 20.

The group also plans to attend a carol service, to at St Michael's Church, Norton, Stourbridge, at 2.15pm on December 16.

It's time to test out those toys

Jill Bytheway at Merry Hill with a great niece, Maariya Khan, and a great-nephew, Riyadh Khan

The Toy Testing Station at Eat Central, in the Merry Hill shopping centre, Brierley Hill

CHILDREN in the Black Country have been giving their verdict on some of the must-have toys for Christmas.

Everything from remote control cars, pinball machines, a keyboard and even an etch-a-sketch for youngsters have come under scrutiny at a toy testing lab set up at Dudley's Merry Hill Centre.

It proved a popular draw with fathers wanting to entertain their young ones while their wives went round the shops or those who needed a break from the bumper shopping crowds.

Top of many youngsters' wish lists this year are figures from the latest Toy Story film such as Buzz Lightyear along with some of the old favourites like building blocks..

Jill Bytheway, aged 41, from St Lawrence Way in Wednesbury visited the toy station with her great niece and nephew Maariya Khan, aged four and Riyadh Khan, aged one from Aldridge.

She said: "I have loved it here as well. They have enjoyed playing with the car garage, Buzz Lightyear and the building blocks."

For Saturdays until December 18 children can head to the toy factory between 11am and 4pm.

thechronicle

Stay away plea by A&E as winter pressures rise

PATIENTS in Dudley are being urged to help ease pressure on the borough's accident and emergency department by attending only if really necessary.

Bosses at Dudley Primary Care Trust are encouraging people to use community services such as Dudley Borough Walk-in Centre, at Holly Hall, local pharmacies and NHS Direct in non-urgent cases.

District nurses and other healthcare workers have been battling through the arctic weather to reach their patients and have been praised for their "tremendous" efforts. GP practices and clinics, running services such as physiotherapy and audiology, are clearing snow and ice from the access to buildings to provide as near a normal service as possible.

Sally-Anne Osborne, associate director for Dudley Community Services, said: "We are making every effort to get to our patients even when the snow is coming down.

"Many of the community staff are dressed in their winter wear to make sure they complete their rounds because the patients we see rely on the services we deliver."

Meanwhile the canal iceboat at Dudley's Black Country Living Museum has been frozen in time by the Arctic conditions which struck last month – trapped by the ice, as are other vessels on waterways.

Iron

Staff were hoping that they would soon be able to give demonstrations of the vital role the vessel, Ross, used to play in keeping open the canals during big freeze-ups.

Industry in the Black Country used to rely upon the iron boat, built in 1847, to carve a path for boats transporting raw materials and other goods.

Fiona Carding, for the museum, said: "Iceboats were dragged through the frozen canal by horses while the team of men on board rocked the vessel to and fro, so as to set up a wave and break the ice."

Action on 90mph driving menace

MEASURES to put the brakes on speeding drivers on a main road will be discussed in the New Year after a Dudley Council investigation.

More than 900 residents of Coseley have signed a petition calling for action.

They say drivers on the A463 Hurst Road near Sedgley are clocking speeds of up to 90mph – three times the 30mph limit.

Members of Dudley Council's North Dudley Area Committee were given a report from officers on how investigations into the problem were progressing.

Officers said a traffic survey would be held on the road near the Childs Avenue junction to monitor the number of cars and pedestrians using it during a 12-hour period.

The road runs along the border with Wolverhampton and officers said talks would take place with the city council to agree on a course of action.

The petition was launched by mother-of-two Paula Matthews, 39, after a spate of crashes. Officers said she would be kept informed of any future progress and would meet her in March.

A further report on the results of the survey will also be presented to the area committee later the same month.

Councillor Melvyn Mottram said: "This road can be very dangerous and any measures will make a real difference."

Pushchairs hit in flats arson

PUSHCHAIRS being stored in a block of flats in Halesowen were destroyed by fire after a suspected arson attack. The small blaze started in the bin store of the flats in Ankerdine Court, Haleso-wen, shortly after 8pm on Sunday. Watch commander Steve Porter said nobody was hurt in the fire.

"A few pushchairs were being stored in there, but other than that it was just smoke damage and a bit of heat damage to the door frame," he said.

Alarm at park arson attacks

YOBS have destroyed benches, litter bins and fences in vandal attacks at a park near Stourbridge.

Dudley taxpayers will now have to foot a bill of more than £1,000 to replace the items and repair damage at King George V Park, Wordsley.

Yobs used old newspapers to start a fire in two attacks at the beauty spot.

They then used wooden benches, fencing and litter bins to fuel the blaze. On both occasions the fires have been started between the tennis courts and games area, also causing damage to plastic bollards and asphalt surfacing.

Evening

The attacks have been reported by Dudley Council's Green Care team.

Residents living close to the park, off Lawnswood Road, are being urged to keep an eye on the site during the evening and call police immediately if they see anyone causing trouble.

Plucky pensioner's ice rescue

Brian Heathcock with 10 year old Cain Foxall, of Rushall Close, Wordsley, whom he rescued from a frozen canal

A PENSIONER rescued a 10-year-old boy from a canal in Stourbridge after the youngster crashed through ice, prompting warnings about the dangers caused by freezing weather.

Brian Heathcock, aged 69, knelt, reached out and pulled terrified Cain Foxall back on to the Stourbridge Canal Arm towpath on Saturday, November 27.

Mr Heathcock, of Fairfield Rise, Wollaston, massaged the shivering boy's legs until he regained his circulation and could be taken to his home about 200 yards away in Rushall Close.

Mr Heathcock, who had been out for a morning walk beside the frozen canal, said: "I heard the boy screaming," said Mr Heathcock.

"He was about three feet out from the side, up to his chest in water. He was sinking and really panicking.

"I had to get down on to my hands and knees and managed to grab his hands."

Cain's mother, Lindsey Foxall, said: "I can't thank Mr Heathcock enough."

Later that day a dog was rescued after getting stuck in icy canal water off Stoney Lane in Netherton.

Hospital rates of death too high

DEATH rates at hospitals in Dudley and Wolverhampton were higher than expected last year, according to the Dr Foster Hospital Guide.

Both The Royal Wolverhampton Hospitals NHS Trust, which runs New Cross, and The Dudley Group of Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, which runs Russells Hall Hospital, were singled out for mention

The survey found the death rate at the Wolverhampton trust was 16 per cent higher than expected, and at the Dudley trust it was 15 per cent higher.

Diagnosis

Paula Clark, chief executive of the Dudley Group of Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, said there had been a big increase in the number of inpatients and day cases in the last four years but the number of deaths has remained almost the same.

The Dr Foster guide uses factors including a patient's diagnosis, age and admission method.

If a trust has the same number of overall deaths as estimated, it is given a score of 100. If it has 10 per cent more or less it gets either 110 or 90. Dudley's was 115 and Wolverhampton's was 116.The death rate at Mid-Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust, which was rocked by a series of tragedies at Stafford Hospital, was 87 – lower than expected.

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Walking tall among the stalls at Stourbridge Christmas festival at the weekend

Town's lights brigthen the gloom

HUNDREDS braved the cold and drizzle for Stourbridge's Christmas festival. Children's TV favourites Dora the Explorer and Go, Diego, Go delighted fans when they showed up to turn on the town's Christmas lights.

High Street and Market Street were closed between 6am and 7pm on Saturday as stalls, funfair rides and even a reindeer pen were set up. Face-painting, balloon-modelling and men on stilts kept visitors entertained and Christmas songs blasted out throughout the day. Festivities continued until 4pm, when the lights were turned on.

Rebecca Stevens, aged 30, of Agenoria Drive, Stourbridge, was there with her sons Todd, three, and Theo, two. She said: "It was really good. It's a shame the weather spoilt it a bit."

Suzie Cutler of Heath Street, Stourbridge, who was there with husband Adrian and children Mary, four, and Miles, two, said: "It was just nice to see the High Street being used and busy."

Rebecca Stevens with sons Todd, aged three, and Theo, two, enjoy the festival

Adrian and Suzie Cutler with Mary, aged four, and Miles, two, try to keep dry

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Hospital parking fines through 1,000 barrier

MORE than 1,030 fines have been issued to drivers parking illegally on roads near a Dudley-hospital during the past year.

Roads around Russells Hall Hospital are regularly clogged with cars as people struggle to find a spot at the car park, prompting complaints from residents living near the site.

Figures show that 1,034 tickets were issued between October 1, 2009, and October 31, 2010, raising thousands of pounds for Dudley Council.

Reduced

There were 962 fines given to people parked along Pensnett High Street, 65 in Bushey Fields Road and seven on the A4101 Pensnett Road.

The council says the "vast majority" of the £50 and £70 fines are paid within 14 days, meaning a reduced figure is paid.

A £6million staff car park with 691 spaces is currently being built at the rear of the hospital. Hospital bosses hope the new multi-storey park will help to ease the congestion on roads and free up space for patients and visitors.

Challenged

Council spokesman Phil Parker said: "Penalty Charge Notices are issued to vehicles that appear to be parking in contravention of the council's traffic regulation orders.

"Any ticket may be challenged by the motorist if they believe it was incorrectly issued."

Staff living within a mile of Russells Hall Hospital will not be allowed to use the new multi-storey park.

Noodle needs oodles of love

CUDDLY kitty Noodle is hoping someone will take him in before Christmas after being found wandering through the streets of Dudley.

He has now been at Stuart Vets in Brook Street, Dudley, for more than a month and head nurse Karen Morton said while all the staff were very fond of him, he needs a real home.

"We have put notices up in the practice and put a "found cat" notice in local papers but nobody has come forward for him," she said.

"We nicknamed him Noodle just because he's fun and a bit greedy. He's a really nice cat so we just want someone to come forward before Christmas to give him a new home. He's quite a big bruiser of a boy but very affectionate. He will make someone a lovely pet."

Miss Morton said staff were unsure of the age of Noodle, a black and white tom cat – but he has been neutered.

Anyone interested in giving Noodle a home can call the veterinary surgery on 01384 252817.

Nurse Becky Turner with Noodle, who is looking for a new home

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New college will keep old surgery

THESE are the first images of what Dudley College's new sixth form and higher education centre could look like if revised plans are given the go-ahead.

Architects at the college have been working on revised plans for the development, off Priory Road, which forms part of a proposed £30 million campus.

The college had hoped to demolish Kudos House, a 19th century doctor's surgery, to make way for the scheme, but last week it was awarded Grade II listed status which effectively protects it from demolition.

It will now be forced to spend more than £1 million incorporating the old building into the designs, and officials are now looking into ways of raising funds.

A future use for Kudos House has yet to be decided, but it could become a tutorial centre for higher education students, an incubation centre for micro-businesses, or it could house college offices, officials said.

The development – called Dudley Sixth and Dudley Higher – will cater for more than 600 students and bosses hope building work will start next summer.

It is expected open in September 2012. The college principal, Lowell Williams, said: "We are very pleased to be releasing these new plans.

"When we were informed of the possible spot-listing of Kudos House, we knew we had to prepare an alternative plan or else the whole of our project could have been in jeopardy.

"Our developments are absolutely integral to the future regeneration of Dudley town centre."

Mr Williams added: "We think our new design still provides a fabulous resource for the town and will greatly enhance the educational facilities for young people and adults.

Burden

"The downside is that the new scheme is significantly more expensive, over £1 million more, and the burden of the cost of retaining and renovating Kudos House falls solely to the college."

English Heritage spokeswoman Renee Fok said Kudos House had "architectural and historic special interest as a remarkably complete and rare early example of a purpose-built doctor's house in a restrained classical style."

A planning application is expected in the new year.

An artist's impression of the new college, which must retain Kudos House

A view of the proposed college development off Priory Road. A planning application is expected to be submitted to Dudley Council after Christmas

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thechronicle

Made to measure as ex-tailor draws town

THE•STARK contrasts between Sedgley just after World War Two and the present has been captured in drawings by a 92-year-old retired tailor and photographs taken six decades later.

Avid local historian and former businessman Ron Baker, of Cotwall End Road, has been drawing scenes of Sedgley village since he left the British Army in 1946, a year after the war.

Now some of his work, showing Sedgley's All Saints Parish Church and the surrounding area around is going on show this weekend alongside photographs of the same locations taken by 57-year-old Martin Jones, of Greenfield View.

Ron Baker with some of his drawings

Ron's drawing of High Holborn Garage

The Old Sunday School in Sedgley

Christmas

Mr Baker, a founder member of Sedgley Local Historical Society, who used to run a chain of shops in the Black Country called Quality Clothes, was born in Swan Village.

He said: "I was based in Kenya during the war and, since I came back in 1946, I must have done 400 drawings of the Sedgley area.

"I wanted to put it all down for history before the area was destroyed for new buildings."

Mr Jones, a parishioner of All Saints and a member of the district church committee, said: "The exhibition will highlight the dramatic change that has happened around the church since the years after Second World War.

"One scene shows the old Sunday school building on the site now occupied by Iceland and Lloyds Chemists, another a tranquil Priory Lane before the construction of the new Sedgley Library and Ladies Walk Health Centre.

"Perhaps the most dramatic contrast is in Dean Street, which until the 60s was home to a row of cottages – all now gone, replaced by a car park."

The exhibition takes place on December 11, 12, 18 and 19 during the church's Christmas Tree Festival.

On both Saturdays – December 11 and 18, between 11am and 3pm – Sedgley residents will be able to record their memories of the church and the village in two audio reminiscence sessions run by Mr Jones.

Mr Jones hopes that, following the taster display during December, a larger exhibition of Mr Baker's previously unpublished drawings will be held in the church in 2011.

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Royal wedding glass sculpture by Malcolm

A GLASS artist in Kingswinford is to create a sculpture to celebrate the wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton.

Allister Malcolm, resident hot glass artist at Broadfield House Glass Museum, is already working on designs for the piece with a view to starting work this month.

The 35-year-old said it was "still early days" for the piece, but planned for it to include precious metals such as gold, and images of the royal couple.

He said it would not be a platter or a bowl like other commemorative pieces in the collection at the museum in Compton Drive, Kingswinford.

Among items in the collection are two platters created by Smethwick glass firm Chase Brothers.

Design

The first was created shortly after the wedding of Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Phillip, Duke of Edinburgh, on November 20, 1947.

The other was created in 1981 to celebrate the wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer.

Mr Malcolm said his piece would be very different to those in the archive and would be a more sculpted design.

"I do not plan to start work on the piece until late December after the items have all been completed for Christmas," he said.

"By the beginning of January I aim to have a prototype piece finished with a view to completing the finished design by the end of the month.

"Obviously for an occasion like this I want it to be something very special."

Mr Malcolm has been an artist at the museum for the past three years, and his latest creation will go on show at Broadfield House.

Artist Allister Malcolm with some of the pieces which were created to commemorate past Royal weddings in the collection at Broadfield House Museum, Kingswinford

Museums to host festive fun activities

AN action-packed programme of activities for the Christmas season has been drawn up by Dudley Council's Juniors at Museums (JAM) Club.

A Christmas festival launched at Broadfield House Glass Museum on Saturday, with arts and crafts sessions, story-telling, and children will also be able to meet Mr and Mrs Claus. Father Christmas will be visiting the Red House Glass Cone every weekend in the run-up to Christmas. As well as getting a gift, youngsters will be able to make crafts and take part in a treasure trail.

Meanwhile, Dudley Museum and Art Gallery and Broadfield House Glass Museum are running pantomime themed trails from December 18 to January 1, while a Narnia trail will run at the Red House Glass Cone until January 2.

Visit **www.dudley.gov.uk/museums** for more details.

Carols boost for charities

THREE charities are in line to benefit from a carol service at Dudley Concert Hall this Sunday night. Kingswinford Christian centre is hosting the concert.

Funds from the night will be split between Acorn's Hospice, the Brierley Hill Project and Mary Stevens Hospice.

There will be music from the Salvation Army Band and contemporary carols Tickets are £3. Call 01384 812812.

thechronicle TECHNOLOGY

Way to join the eBook revolution on a budget

THE BookBox from View Quest is a great budget eBook reader for those who don't want to fork out for one of the more expensive electronic readers or tablets.

It also doubles as a media centre, able to play videos, display photos and play music.

It's main task, displaying eBooks, is handled well. The five inch high-resolution backlit display with its anti-glare TFT screen can be read in bright sunshine or darkness with adjustable brightness, background and text colours.

There are the bookmarking, auto flip, zoom and screen rotation features that you would expect. The discrete button control system is easy to use with on-screen guides.

Video

All mainstream eBook formats are applicable, including Adobe DRM eBooks now widely available to download, and such everyday formats as PDF, ePub, TXT and HMTL. Graphic novels, comics and PDF brochures look particularly impressive.

The video, photo and music functions are easy to use with a nice crisp video image. All the major video formats are catered for including avi, wmv, mp4, mov, xvid and divx.

You have to pop on a pair of phones for sound and a background music function allows you to listen to tunes whilst reading.

The BookBox has a rubberized case which gives it nice hand feel and comes with a reasonably generous 2GB of internal memory (enough for thousands of eBooks).

There is also a slot for a SD/SDHC/MMC memory card for those who want to take lots of videos or a few libraries' worth of entertainment around with them.

Battery life is around six hours for reading and 20 hours for listening to music.

Content can be added by connecting the BookBox via the supplied USB cable to a PC for drag and drop, which can also be used to charge the device.

An AC adapter and leather-look black carry case are included.

As for the cons, you must press a button to rotate the images between portrait and landscape rather than the view shifting automatically, the screen is not touch sensitive and there are no speakers. But these are functions you would associate with far more expensive gadgets than the China-made BookBox, which is available for under £100.

HMV have it online at the time of writing for £79.99 though it will cost more in store.

Leon Burakowski

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The recommended retail price is £169 but you can find this machine widely available for under £100 at independent cook shops and department stores, and online.

For a list of stockists call Judge Cookware on 0117 940 0000.

Go on a PSP monster hunt

MONSTER hunting game Invizimals Shadowzone (7) and the cute EyePet (3) are now available, on their own or bundled with a PSP camera for fans of the handheld Sony games console.

Plugging the camera into your PSP, as well as adding camera functionality, turns the machine into a monster detector in the latest Invizimals game, which combines elements of Pokemon and The Spiderwick Chronicles. Shadowzone adds new monsters for the collectors.

Meanwhile, PS3 hit the EyePet is monkey-like virtual pet who you can bring to your home via the PSP-camera set up.

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Double fire attack hits beauty spot

YOBS have destroyed benches, litter bins and fences in vandal attacks at a park in Dudley.

Taxpayers will now have to foot a bill of more than £1,000 to replace the items and repair damage at King George V Park, Wordsley.

Yobs used old newspapers to start a fire in two attacks at the beauty spot.

They then used wooden benches, fencing and litter bins to fuel the blaze.

On both occasions the fires have been started between the tennis courts and the park's games area.

Plastic

The blazes also caused damage to plastic bollards and asphalt surfacing.

The attacks have been reported by Dudley Council's Green Care team.

Residents living near to the park, off Lawnswood Road, are being urged to keep an eye on the site during the evening.

And they are asked to call police immediately if they see people causing trouble.

'Rat run' protest in street

RESIDENTS in Dudley are calling for action to end a year of misery caused by drivers using a rat run to avoid roadworks.

People living in Oakham Road say the street is clogged with cars during the morning and evening rush hours since work began at Burnt Tree island.

They say the increase in traffic is putting lives at risk and has left many residents afraid to cross the road.

A speed visor, which flashes a number 30 when a car exceeds the limit, has been erected but residents say it has had no effect as drivers simply ignore it.

They want speed cameras, road humps or chicanes to be installedd, but Dudley Council has said it will not be considered until 2011-12 financial year.

Resident Sheila Jones, aged 62, said: "The road is either so busy it's dangerous to cross or the cars are speeding so fast you take your life in your hands."

RSPCA appeal for volunteers

VOLUNTEERS are needed in Dudley to help collect RSPCA donations.

The RSPCA Birmingham Animal Centre wants people to give up two hours on December 11 between 10am and 4pm. Call Helen Tuite on 07715 540518.

Don't fret, plenty of pluck is on hand for festive concert

Getting ready for a Christmas concert at the Bonded Warehouse, in Stourbridge, is Danielle Saxon Reeves, of the Midlands Fretted Orchestra

AN EVENING of musical entertainment is being lined up to celebrate the festive season in Stourbridge next week .

The Midlands Fretted Orchestra will be performing at The Bonded Warehouse in Canal Street on Saturday, December 11.

The Christmas concert will start at 7.30pm but doors and the bar open at 7pm. Tickets are £6 but under-16s are free when accompanied by an adult.

The group, which rehearses in Bearwood, performs a festive concert every year at the venue.

The orchestra is an ensemble of 26 dedicated musicians of all ages who play a fretted instrument such as guitar, mandolin or banjo.

For tickets, call 0121 422 7884.

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thechronicle

Going, going, gone... a Victorian landmark

A demolition team has moved in at Saltwells House at Saltwells Nature Reserve, Netherton

Bulldozers at manor built by nobleman

IT WAS ONCE a fine manor house at the heart of a Black Country beauty spot but these pictures show the sad ending for historic Saltwells House.

Contractors have begun demolishing the derelict 19th century property and have already removed one of the exterior walls revealing the rooms inside surrounded by rubble. The landmark building, which stands within Saltwells Nature Reserve, in Netherton, had become a magnet for vandals after falling into disrepair and was sold to developers earlier this year.

Saltwells House, built by the Earl of Dudley in the 19th century, closed in 2001

Councillor David Cotterill, Pat Randle, Della Wars, Tracy Poolton, Joe Grosvenor, Councillor David Sparks with a member of the demolition team

The demolition is expected to take around four weeks.

Councillor Bryan Cotterill, who has led campaigns to save the house, said: "It's the end of an era.

"I am sad to see Saltwells House go and to see it demolished in this way is a real shame.

"But it had fallen into a sorry state of disrepair and it would have taken more than a 60-minute makeover to get it back to its former glory.

"Sadly, demolition has been necessary because it had become a safety risk.

"Vandals were breaking in and starting fires and someone could have been seriously injured if that was allowed to continue."

Nursing

The Saltwells Action Group member said he was waiting to hear what was going to be proposed for the future use of the site.

"I want it to be something in keeping with the nature reserve," he added.

Saltwells House, build more than 150 years ago by the Earl of Dudley, was bought by regeneration developer Dudley Public Sector Partnership, which is 50 per cent owned by Dudley Council. Its plans for the site have not yet been announced.

The building, which closed in 2001, had previously been used as a school and a nursing home.

Offices for the nature reserve's park rangers may also have to be moved.

Computer pioneer dies, 97

A DUDLEY-BORN mathematics wizard dubbed the father of British computing for his pioneering work in the late 1940s has died at the age of 97.

Professor Sir Maurice Wilkes designed and built the Edsac computer which set standards on how the technology could be used in learning and business.

Maurice Wilkes was born to parents Vincent and Ellen on June 26, 1913.

He was very proud of his father, who started work on the Earl of Dudley's estate as a 16-year-old office boy and then worked his way up. The future professor attended King Edward VI School, in Stourbridge town centre, and in 1931 started his studies in mathematical physics at St John's College, Cambridge.

Laboratory

He gained his PhD from the university in 1938 after researching radio waves.

Wilkes became the head of the mathematical laboratory at Cambridge University in 1946 and held the post until 1970.

He then headed the computer laboratory from 1970-80, and started developing the Edsac machine following his work in developing radar during World War Two.

It followed his studies of design documents for what would become the USA's Edvac machine, which convinced him that computers were the future.

Wilkes attended a series of lectures in the US, which were run by the scientists who had created the Eniac and Edvac computers. He was knighted in 2000.

Sir Maurice,who died late last month, is survived by his children Anthony, Margaret and Helen.

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the pulse

There is nothing like a dame

3D magic comes to Wolverhampton this festive season when an animated genie will be among the stars of the Grand's pantomime, Aladdin, alongside top panto dame Christopher Biggins.

Rocks, spiders and a head-spinning genie come flying towards the audience in hi-tech special effects in the show from panto production house Qdos, which will be staged at the Grand from Saturday, December 11, to January 30.

Former 'King of the Jungle' Biggins and hip comedy ventriloquist Paul Zerdin will ensure lots of chuckles during the city's big Christmas show but the biggest wow factor will come when audiences put on the special glasses issued by the usherettes.

"It's going to be a spectacular pantomime," says Biggins.

Christopher Biggins interview on page xx.

YOUR EIGHT-PAGE ENTERTAINMENT GUIDE AND WEEK'S TV VIEWING

Sophie Ellis-Bextor is going back on tour - interview – page xx

Glenn's homage to home – page xx

Clary doing a turn again with panto virgin Joan

Joan Collins – debut

DICK Whittington hits the stage at Birmingham Hippodrome this festive season starring Joan Collins – in her panto debut – and Julian Clary, who began his comedy career under the name 'The Joan Collins Fan Club'.

Also appearing in the star-studded show will be Walsall-born Hi-De-Hi star Jeffrey Holland as the Dame, and actor Nigel Havers (as King Rat) who recently quit the jungle by storming off TV show I'm A Celebrity... Get Me Out Of Here!

Top of the bill will be glamorous former Dynasty star Joan Collins, who will be the wicked Queen Rat. Keith Harris and Orville the Duck play the rat catchers.

Julian Clary, who will be returning to the Hippodrome to play The Spirit of the Bells, said: "This is probably the biggest and most lavish pantomime I have ever been involved in."

Dick Whittington opens on Saturday, December 18, and runs until January 30.

Pulse is taking a Christmas break but will be back in the New Year.

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25.12.10	CHRISTMAS DAY	EMERGENCIES	EMERGENCIES	EMERGENCIES	EMERGENCIES
26.12.10	BOXING DAY	10.00-4.00PM	EMERGENCIES	EMERGENCIES	EMERGENCIES
27.12.10	BANK HOLIDAY	10.00-4.00PM	EMERGENCIES	EMERGENCIES	EMERGENCIES
28.12.10	BANK HOLIDAY	10.00-4.00PM	EMERGENCIES	EMERGENCIES	EMERGENCIES
29.12.10	NORMAL HOURS	9.00-7.00PM	9.00-7.00PM	9.00-7.00PM	9.00-7.00PM
30.12.10	NORMAL HOURS	9.00-7.00PM	9.00-7.00PM	9.00-7.00PM	9.00-7.00PM
31.12.10	NEW YEARS EVE	9.00-5.00PM	9.00-12.00PM	9.00-12.00PM	9.00-12.00PM
01.01.11	NEW YEARS DAY	10.00-2.00PM	EMERGENCIES	EMERGENCIES	EMERGENCIES
02.01.11	NORMAL HOURS	10.00-5.00PM	EMERGENCIES	EMERGENCIES	EMERGENCIES
03.01.11	BANK HOLIDAY	10.00-4.00PM	EMERGENCIES	EMERGENCIES	EMERGENCIES

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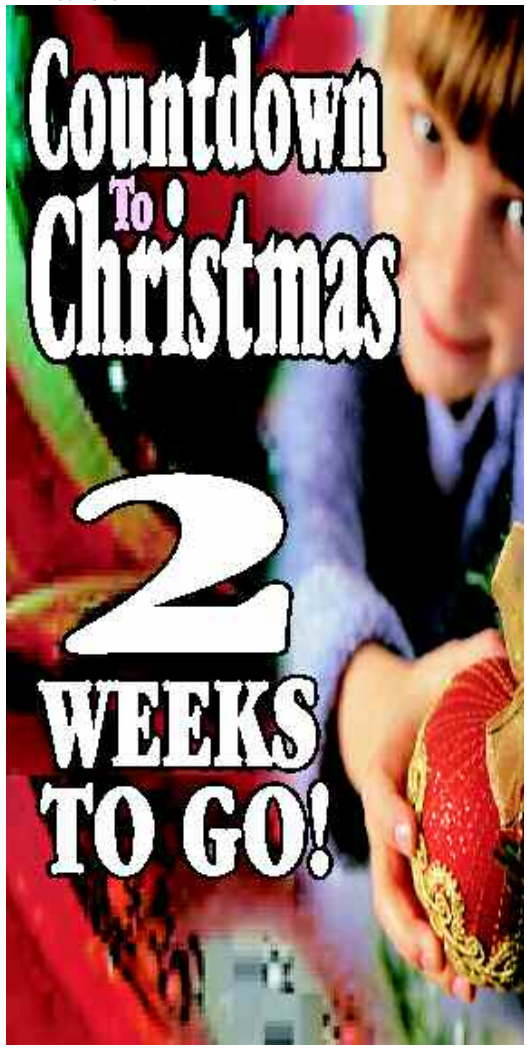

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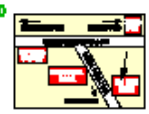

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IT'S PANTO time… oh yes it is! Aladdin arrives at the Grand in Wolverhampton with Christopher Biggins as Widow Twankey, ventriloquist Paul Zerdin as Aladdin and an animated 3D genie. The show is on from Saturday to the end of January.

Meanwhile, over in Birmingham, Joan Collins and Nigel Havers as Queen and King Rat will be menacing Dick Whittington at Birmingham Hippodrome from December 18 to the end of January.

If you are looking for an alternative to traditional festive fare, Jodie Prenger, Matthew Kelly and Todd Carty are starring in Monty Python musical Spamalot at Birmingham's Alexandra Theatre until New Year's Day.

Preview performances of Matilda, Roald Dahl's story of a telekinetic schoolgirl who gets her revenge on a monstrous headmistress and a loveless family, has been getting standing ovations at Stratford where the Royal Shakespeare's colourful new production features songs by Aussie comedian Tim Minchin. It's on until January 30.

Birmingham Repertory Theatre brings childhood favourite, The Secret Garden by Frances Hodgson Burnett, to the stage this Christmas, to January 8. David Bintley's lavish new production of the classic fairy tale Cinderella for Birmingham Royal Ballet, with music by Prokofiev, is on until Sunday. Birmingham Stage Company presents the children's fantasy The Firework Maker's Daughter, based on a story by author of The Golden Compass Philip Pullman, at the city's Old Rep theatre until January 28.

The Crescent Theatre Company present their version of TV favourite Dad's Army at Birmingham's Crescent Theatre from this Saturday to December 18.

Tonight (Thursday) Jeff Wayne's War of the Worlds at the NIA features Jason Donovan, Rhydian, Justin Hayward, a 36-piece string section and a giant Martian fighting machine.

REVIEWS

An Evening with Gervase Phinn Prince of Wales Theatre, Cannock.

Jesus came from an egg. How? Because Mary laid him in a manger or at least that's how one young girl saw it in the world according to raconteur and professional Yorkshireman Gervase Phinn.

Phinn was on form with his endless stream of observations, poignant tales and anecdotes which he has collected through many years as an Ofsted inspector in and around the Yorkshire Dales.

He kept the almost packed Prince of Wales audience enthralled and at one point, recounting a story inspired by The Beatles' Eleanor Rigby about a dying priest named father McKenzie and his innocent and inspiring relationship with a young boy, you could have heard a pin drop in the almost churchlike reverence that Phinn's congregation were held in.

Phinn's appeal is he has never lost the ability to think and see life from a child's point of view.

His stories range from being given a lesson on sheep by an eight year old expert while trying desperately to recount the parable of the lost sheep, to feeling awkward about having to go back to his own boyhood schools and assess the teachers who taught him.

A Mrs Greenhouse during one such encounter told him, "Well what a strange way the world has of turning out when I taught you how to read and now you have come back to see if I am doing it right."

Phinn has a clarity and incisiveness which doesn't use smut, offensive behaviour or language and is a refreshing alternative to a lot of the sneering and cynicism around today.

And what is innuendo? According to one of Phinn's subjects it's an Italian suppository.

Danny Farragher

The Secret Garden, Birmingham Rep.

The final production before the Rep's two year closure due to construction of the city's new library lives up to the theatre's reputation for technical brilliance but lacks festive warmth.

Over long and weighed down by too many mediocre songs, this stodgy musical version of Frances Hodgson Burnett's classic Victorian tale about two upperclass children transformed by experiencing nature has great potential. Get rid of a third of the songs, lop half an hour off the 150 minute running time (with interval), and it could be special.

The acting and singing are superb. Amy Lennox is engaging as petulant Mary and James Gillan, as bedridden Colin, has the best song as he determines to leave his sickbed. Evelyn Hoskins is a a treat as Martha the maid, her skipping song a highlight.

The revolving set of mansion and garden is excellent but, apart from the scene where it snows in the secret garden, festive sparkle and magic are in short supply.

The Secret Garden is at Birmingham Rep until January 8.

Leon Burakowski

Amy Lennox as Mary Lennox

Sophie's choice of music

Sophie Ellis Bextor talks to ANNABEL MOTTRAM about going back on tour.

Ten years on from the release of what has just been named the most played radio tune of the past decade, Sophie Ellis Bextor is back on tour with fourth album, Straight to the Heart.

The married Mum of two has taken a seven year break from solo touring and promises an upbeat, dance floor filling return to her Groovejet, 'If this Ain't Love' best.

"My style of music has come full circle really – I started off with a dance hit and have worked with the likes of Freemasons and Calvin Harris for my latest album.

"The tour is high energy with an upbeat set, including all my old hits as well as the new material – everyone will be up on their feet."

Over the past few years Ms Bextor has toured with legendary acts Take That, George Michael and Elton John and is now happy to be the centre of attention again.

"I have been really lucky to work with some amazing people and now come back in my own right – performing for a live audience and getting the crowds going."

The singer, songwriter and model has for the past two years also been enjoining success dj-ing with her husband, The Feeling guitarist Richard Jones.

Sophie, who named her 2008 Olympic handover rendition of Carly Simon's Nobody Does it Better at Buckingham Palace as a career highlight, is to tour for three weeks beginning in Moscow.

"I have a big Russian following and love going over, it's four hours on a plane but a different world altogether. I'm looking forward to my return to Birmingham though; I've sung here many times before and love the different venues and atmosphere."

Sophie Ellis-Bextor is in concert at Birmingham O2 Academy 2, December 18.

Sophie Ellis-Bextor.

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Saturday TV

Choice

BBC1

[illegible] Breakfast. [illegible] Saturday Kitchen Live. [illegible] Nigella's Kitchen (R) [illegible] BBC News; Regional News; Weather. [illegible] Football Focus. [illegible] Inside Sport: The Marion Jones Story (R) [illegible] Live Snooker: UK Championship. The opening session of the second semi-final. [illegible] Final Score. [illegible] BBC News; Regional News; Weather. [illegible] The Impressions Show with Culshaw and Stephenson. More celebrity parodies, with Jon Culshaw and Debra Stephenson (R)

[illegible] **Strictly Come Dancing.** The five remaining couples compete in the second semi-final.

[illegible] **Total Wipeout – Celebrity Special.** Richard Hammond presents the first of two celebrity specials. (R)

[illegible] **The National Lottery Saturday Night Draw.** Featuring musical guests [illegible].

[illegible] **Casualty.** [illegible]

[illegible]

BBC2

[illegible] CBeebies. [illegible] CBBC. [illegible] BBC Switch: The Cut. [illegible] BBC Switch: The Season (R) [illegible] BBC Switch: The Season (R) [illegible] BBC Switch: The 5:19 Show. [illegible] BBC Switch Revealed. [illegible] BBC Switch Revealed. [illegible] The Sky at Night (R) [illegible] Film: The Big Circus (1959) Drama, starring Victor Mature. [illegible] Live Snooker: UK Championship. Further coverage of the opening session of the second semi-final. [illegible] Dad's Army (R)

[illegible] **Making Scotland's Landscape.** How Scottish engineers and scientists contributed to climate change. Last in the series.

[illegible] **Live Snooker: UK Championship.** Hazel Irvine presents coverage of the second and concluding session of the second semi-final of the ranking tournament at the Telford International Centre.

[illegible]

ITV1

[illegible]

Channel 4

[illegible]

Channel Five

[illegible]

Digital

[illegible]

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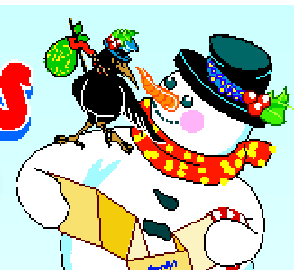

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Choice

BBC1

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BBC2

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ITV1

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Channel 4

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Channel Five

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Digital

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Unstoppable	12.15 3.05 5.35 8.05 10.30 PG
Unstoppable 3D	11.15 2.05 4.35 7.05 9.35 (12.00) PG Premier 11.45 2.35
The Warrior's Way	4.40 7.50 10.15 (12.35) 15
Unstoppable	11.45 2.20 4.45 7.15 9.40 (11.55) 12A
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Monday

BBC1 6.00 Breakfast. 9.15 Rip Off Britain. 10.00 Homes Under the Hammer. (R) BBC News; Weather. 11.00 Real Rescues. 11.45 To Buy or Not to Buy; BBC News; Weather. 12.15 Bargain Hunt. (R) 1.00 BBC News; Weather. 1.30 Regional News; Weather. 1.45 Doctors. 2.15 Escape to the Country. (R) 3.00 BBC News; Weather; Regional News. 3.05 CBBC. 5.15 Weakest Link. 6.00 BBC News; Weather. 6.30 Regional News Programmes; Weather. 7.00 The One Show. 7.30 Inside Out; BBC News; Regional News. 8.00 EastEnders. 8.30 Baby P: In His Mother's Words – Panorama. 9.00 Accused. 10.00 BBC News. 10.25 Regional News; Weather. 10.35 A Question of Sport. 11.05 Sports Personality of the Year: The Contenders. 11.45 The Graham Norton Show. (R) Weatherview. 12.40 Sign Zone: The Apprentice. (R) 1.40 A Life without Work. (R) 2.40 The Story of Science – Power, Proof and Passion. (R) 3.40 BBC News.

BBC2 6.00 CBeebies. 7.00 CBBC. 8.30 CBeebies. 11.30 Animal Park. (R) 12.00 Daily Politics. 12.30 GMT with George Alagiah. 1.00 Due South. (R) 1.45 Film 2010 with Claudia Winkleman. (R) 2.15 Ready Steady Cook. (R) 3.00 Murder, She Wrote. (R) 3.45 Flog It! Ten of the Best. 4.30 Pointless. (R) 5.15 The Hairy Bikers' Cook Off. 6.00 Celebrity Eggheads. 6.30 Strictly Come Dancing – It Takes Two. 7.00 This World: Pakistan's Flood Doctor. 8.00 University Challenge. 8.30 Miranda. 9.00 Ian Hislop's Age of the Do-Gooders. 10.00 Grumpy Old Men. (R) 10.30 Newsnight; Weather. 11.20 American Dream. (R) 12.20 BBC News. 3.40 Close.

ITV1 6.00 Daybreak. 8.30 Lorraine. 9.25 The Jeremy Kyle Show. 10.30 This Morning. 12.30 Loose Women. 1.30 ITV News; Weather. 1.55 Regional News; Weather. 2.00 House Gift. 3.00 Dickinson's Real Deal. (R) 3.50 Regional Weather. 4.00 Midsomer Murders. (R) 5.00 The Alan Titchmarsh Show. 6.00 Regional News; Weather. 6.30 ITV News; Weather. 7.00 Emmerdale. 7.30 Coronation Street. 8.00 Countrywise Kitchen. 8.30 Coronation Street. 9.00 The Savoy. 10.00 ITV News at Ten; Weather. 10.30 Regional News; Weather. 10.35 Film: Young Adam. (2003) Premiere. Period drama, starring Ewan McGregor. 12.25 The Zone; ITV News Headlines. 2.25 UEFA Champions League Weekly. 2.55 The Jeremy Kyle Show. (R) 4.40 ITV Nightscreen. 5.30 ITV Morning News.

Channel 4 6.10 Sail Mail. (R) 6.15 The Treade People. (R) 6.30 Planet Cook. (R) 6.50 Yo Gabba Gabba. (R) 7.15 Freshly Squeezed. 7.40 Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) 8.05 Smallville. 9.00 One Tree Hill. 9.55 Friends. (R) 10.25 Friends. (R) 10.55 Glee. (R) 12.00 Channel 4 News Summary. 12.05 Chronicles of Narnia: The Voyage of the Dawn Treader: T4 Movie Special. (R) 12.30 Iron Chef UK. 1.45 Film: Hills of Home. (1948) Family drama, with Edmund Gwenn. 3.25 Countdown. 4.10 Deal or No Deal. 5.00 Come Dine with Me. 5.30 Four in a Bed. 6.00 The Simpsons. 6.30 Hollyoaks. 7.00 Channel 4 News. 7.55 4thought.tv. 8.00 Heston's Christmas Feast. (R) 9.00 River Cottage Christmas. 10.00 Alan Carr: Chatty Man. 11.05 Peep Show. (R) 11.40 The Simpsons. (R) 12.10 Music on 4 Favourites: James Blunt. 12.40 Premier League Poker. 1.40 Film: Guilty By Suspicion. (1991) Drama, starring Robert De Niro. 3.25 King of the Hill. 4.10 Brothers & Sisters. (R) 4.55 ER. (R) 5.40 One Tree Hill.

Channel Five 6.00 Milkshake! 9.15 The Wright Stuff. 10.45 Trisha Goddard. (R) 11.45 Five News. 11.50 CSI: NY. (R) 12.45 CSI: NY. (R) 1.45 Neighbours. 2.15 Home and Away. 2.50 Your Sport. 2.55 Magic in Moments. (R) 3.05 Film: A Christmas Visitor. (2002) Drama, starring Reagan Pasternak. 5.00 Five News; Weather. 5.30 Neighbours. (R) 6.00 Home and Away. (R) 6.25 Live from Studio Five. 7.00 Five News at 7. 7.30 How Do They Do It?; Five News Update. 8.00 The Gadget Show; Five News at 9. 9.00 Extreme Fishing with Robson Green. 10.00 Film: Sudden Impact. (1983) Crime thriller sequel, directed by and starring Clint Eastwood. 12.25 The World of Stupid Criminals. 12.55 SuperCasino. 4.00 The FBI Files. (R) 4.45 House Doctor. (R) 5.10 Michaela's Wild Challenge. (R)

Tuesday

BBC1 6.00 Breakfast. 9.15 Rip Off Britain. 10.00 Homes Under the Hammer. (R) BBC News; Weather. 11.00 Real Rescues. 11.45 To Buy or Not to Buy; BBC News; Weather. 12.15 Bargain Hunt. (R) 1.00 BBC News; Weather. 1.30 Regional News; Weather. 1.45 Doctors. 2.15 Escape to the Country. (R) 3.00 BBC News; Weather; Regional News. 3.05 CBBC. 5.15 Weakest Link. (R) 6.00 BBC News; Weather. 6.30 Regional News Programmes; Weather. 7.00 The One Show. 7.30 EastEnders; BBC News; Regional News. 8.00 Holby City. 9.00 Crimewatch. 10.00 BBC News. 10.25 Regional News; Weather. 10.35 Crimewatch Update. 10.45 Imagine. 11.35 Film: The Wackness. (2008) Premiere. Comedy drama, starring Ben Kingsley; Weatherview. 1.15 Sign Zone: See Hear. (R) 1.45 The Big Silence. (R) 2.45 The Bionic Vet. (R) 3.15 BBC News.

BBC2 6.00 CBeebies. 7.00 CBBC. 8.30 CBeebies. 11.30 Animal Park. (R) 12.00 Daily Politics. 12.30 GMT with George Alagiah. 1.00 Due South. (R) 1.45 Car Booty. (R) 2.15 Ready Steady Cook. (R) 3.00 Murder, She Wrote. (R) 3.45 Flog It! Ten of the Best. 4.30 Pointless. (R) 5.15 The Hairy Bikers' Cook Off. 6.00 Celebrity Eggheads. 6.30 Strictly Come Dancing – It Takes Two. 7.00 Coast. (R) 8.00 Decade of Discovery. 9.00 Pompeii: Life and Death in a Roman Town. 10.00 Miranda. (R) 10.30 Newsnight; Weather. 11.20 This World: Pakistan's Flood Doctor. (R) 12.20 BBC News. 3.15 Close.

ITV1 6.00 Daybreak. 8.30 Lorraine. 9.25 The Jeremy Kyle Show. 10.30 This Morning. 12.30 Loose Women. 1.30 ITV News; Weather. 1.55 Regional News; Weather. 2.00 House Gift. 3.00 Dickinson's Real Deal. (R) 3.50 Regional Weather. 4.00 Midsomer Murders. (R) 5.00 The Alan Titchmarsh Show. 6.00 Regional News; Weather. 6.30 ITV News; Weather. 7.00 Emmerdale. 7.30 Living in Fear: Tonight. 8.00 A Touch of Frost. (R) 10.00 ITV News at Ten; Weather. 10.30 Regional News; Weather. 10.35 The War You Don't See. 12.25 The Zone; ITV News Headlines. 2.25 The Rockford Files. (R) 3.20 The Jeremy Kyle Show. (R) 4.15 ITV Nightscreen. 5.30 ITV Morning News.

Channel 4 6.25 Planet Cook. (R) 6.45 Yo Gabba Gabba. (R) 7.15 Freshly Squeezed. 7.40 Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) 8.05 Smallville. 9.00 One Tree Hill. 9.55 Friends. (R) 10.30 Friends. (R) 11.00 Glee. (R) 12.00 Channel 4 News Summary. 12.05 Iron Chef UK. 1.05 Film: Swiss Family Robinson. (1960) Disney adventure, starring John Mills. 3.25 Countdown. 4.10 Deal or No Deal. 5.00 Come Dine with Me. 5.30 Four in a Bed. 6.00 The Simpsons. 6.30 Hollyoaks. 7.00 Channel 4 News. 7.55 4thought.tv. 8.00 Kirstie's Homemade Home. 9.00 The Family. 10.00 Frankie Boyle's Tramadol Nights. 10.35 The Morgana Show. 11.10 The Big Bang Theory. 11.35 Robert's Web. (R) 12.10 Music on 4: Russian Standard Vodka Presents: Paloma Faith. 12.25 Music on 4: The Album Chart Show Spotlight. 12.40 Music on 4: The Crush. 1.05 World B-Boy Series. (R) 2.00 Freesports on 4. (R) 2.30 Beach Volleyball. 3.20 KOTV Boxing Weekly. 3.50 World Sport. (R) 4.15 Survival of the Fittest. (R) 4.45 Sailing. (R) 5.10 Deadliest Catch. (R)

Channel Five 6.00 Milkshake! 9.15 The Wright Stuff. 10.45 Trisha Goddard. (R) 11.45 Five News. 11.50 CSI: NY. (R) 12.45 CSI: NY. (R) 1.45 Neighbours. 2.15 Home and Away. 2.50 Your Sport. 2.55 Magic in Moments. (R) 3.10 Film: The Christmas Gift. (1986) Drama, starring John Denver. 5.00 Five News; Weather. 5.30 Neighbours. (R) 6.00 Home and Away. (R) 6.25 Live from Studio Five. 7.00 Five News at 7. 7.30 Street Market Chefs. Two Monmouthshire chefs produce meals using Welsh lamb; Five News Update. 8.00 Sea Patrol UK. A rock climber is stranded on a cliff face. Last in the series; Five News at 9. 9.00 CSI: Miami. A car bomb kills an attorney who was working with Delko. 10.00 CSI: NY. Mac and Stella track a serial killer to a Manhattan museum. (R) Five News Update. 11.00 CSI: Crime Scene Investigation. Catherine's father is suspected of murder. (R) 12.00 The CSI. (R) 12.55 SuperCasino. 4.00 The FBI Files. (R) 4.45 House Doctor. (R) 5.10 Michaela's Wild Challenge. (R)

Wednesday

BBC1 6.00 Breakfast. 9.15 Rip Off Britain. 10.00 Homes Under the Hammer. (R) BBC News; Weather. 11.00 Real Rescues. 11.45 To Buy or Not to Buy; BBC News; Weather. 12.15 Bargain Hunt. (R) 1.00 BBC News; Weather. 1.30 Regional News; Weather. 1.45 Doctors. 2.15 Escape to the Country. (R) 3.00 BBC News; Weather; Regional News. 3.05 CBBC. 5.15 Weakest Link. 6.00 BBC News; Weather. 6.30 Regional News Programmes; Weather. 7.00 The One Show. 7.30 Dig 1940; BBC News; Regional News. 8.00 Jimmy's Food Factory. 8.30 Nigel Slater's Simple Suppers. 9.00 The Apprentice. 10.00 BBC News. 10.25 Regional News; Weather. 10.35 The National Lottery Wednesday Night Draws. 10.45 Film 2010 with Claudia Winkleman; National Lottery Update. 11.25 Film: When a Man Loves a Woman. (1994) Drama, starring Andy Garcia and Meg Ryan; Weatherview. 1.30 Sign Zone: Country Tracks. (R) 2.25 Return of the Rhino: A Last Chance to See Special. (R) 3.25 A Life without Work. (R) 4.25 BBC News.

BBC2 6.00 CBeebies. 7.00 CBBC. 8.30 CBeebies. 11.30 Daily Politics. 1.00 See Hear. 1.30 Car Booty. (R) 2.15 Ready Steady Cook. (R) 3.00 Murder, She Wrote. (R) 3.45 Flog It! Ten of the Best. 4.30 Pointless. (R) 5.15 The Hairy Bikers' Cook Off. 6.00 Celebrity Eggheads. 6.30 Strictly Come Dancing – It Takes Two. 7.00 Escape to the Country. (R) 8.00 Edwardian Farm. 9.00 Ancient Worlds. 10.00 The Apprentice: You're Fired. 10.30 Newsnight; Weather. 11.20 At Home with the Georgians. (R) 12.20 BBC News. 4.25 Close.

ITV1 6.00 Daybreak. 8.30 Lorraine. 9.25 The Jeremy Kyle Show. 10.30 This Morning. 12.30 Loose Women. 1.30 ITV News; Weather. 1.55 Regional News; Weather. 2.00 House Gift. 3.00 Dickinson's Real Deal. (R) 3.50 Regional Weather. 4.00 Midsomer Murders. (R) 5.00 The Alan Titchmarsh Show. 6.00 Regional News; Weather. 6.30 ITV News; Weather. 7.00 Emmerdale. 7.30 The Lakes. (R) 8.00 A Touch of Frost. (R) 10.00 ITV News at Ten; Weather. 10.30 Regional News; Weather. 10.35 Film: Falling Down. (1993) Urban thriller, starring Michael Douglas. 12.40 The Zone; ITV News Headlines. 2.40 Film: End of Days. (1999) Supernatural action thriller, starring Arnold Schwarzenegger. 4.40 ITV Nightscreen. 5.30 ITV Morning News.

Channel 4 6.00 Sail Mail. (R) 6.05 The Treade People. (R) 6.15 Planet Cook. (R) 6.40 Yo Gabba Gabba. (R) 7.05 Freshly Squeezed. 7.35 Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) 8.00 According to Jim. (R) 8.30 Frasier. (R) 9.00 One Tree Hill. 9.55 Friends. (R) 10.30 Friends. (R) 11.00 Glee. (R) 12.00 Channel 4 News Summary. 12.05 River Cottage Bites. (R) 12.20 Iron Chef UK. 1.20 Film: The Love Bug. (1968) Disney comedy, starring Dean Jones. 3.25 Countdown. 4.10 Deal or No Deal. 5.00 Come Dine with Me. 5.30 Four in a Bed. 6.00 The Simpsons. 6.30 Hollyoaks. 7.00 Channel 4 News. 7.55 4thought.tv. 8.00 The Million Pound Drop Live. 9.00 Grand Designs. 10.00 Hollyoaks. 11.05 The Event. (R) 12.05 Reaper. 12.50 Film: Isolation. (2005) Premiere. Horror, starring Essie Davis. 2.30 King of the Hill. 2.55 ER. (R) 3.40 Brothers & Sisters. (R) 4.30 Hill Street Blues. (R) 5.25 One Tree Hill.

Channel Five 6.00 Milkshake! 9.15 The Wright Stuff. 10.45 Trisha Goddard. (R) 11.45 Five News. 11.50 CSI: NY. (R) 12.45 CSI: NY. (R) 1.45 Neighbours. 2.15 Home and Away. 2.45 Magic in Moments. (R) 2.55 Magic in Moments. (R) 3.10 Film: Noel. (2004) Drama, starring Susan Sarandon. 5.00 Five News; Weather. 5.30 Neighbours. (R) 6.00 Home and Away. (R) 6.25 Live from Studio Five. 7.00 Five News at 7. 7.30 Live UEFA Europa League Football: Liverpool v FC Utrecht (Kick-off 8.05pm). Jim Rosenthal introduces coverage of the UEFA Europa League Group K match at Anfield. 10.10 Film: Second in Command. (2006) An east European official guarding a US ambassador in Moldova looks for an escape route when a violent rebellion breaks out. Thriller, with Jean-Claude Van Damme. 12.00 Poker. 1.00 SuperCasino. 4.00 The FBI Files. (R) 4.45 House Doctor. (R) 5.10 Michaela's Wild Challenge. (R)

Thursday

BBC1 6.00 Breakfast. 9.15 Rip Off Britain. 10.00 Homes Under the Hammer. (R) BBC News; Weather. 11.00 Real Rescues. 11.45 To Buy or Not to Buy; BBC News; Weather. 12.15 Bargain Hunt. (R) 1.00 BBC News; Weather. 1.30 Regional News; Weather. 1.45 Doctors. 2.15 Escape to the Country. (R) 3.00 BBC News; Weather; Regional News. 3.05 CBBC. 5.15 Weakest Link. (R) 6.00 BBC News; Weather. 6.30 Regional News Programmes; Weather. 7.00 The One Show. 7.30 EastEnders; BBC News; Regional News. 8.00 The Royal Variety Performance 2010. 10.00 BBC News. 10.25 Regional News; Weather. 10.35 The Apprentice – Why I Fired Them. 11.35 This Week; Skiing Weatherview. 12.30 Sign Zone: Baby P: In His Mother's Words – Panorama. (R) 1.00 Countryfile. (R) 1.55 Antiques Roadshow. (R) 2.55 The Young Ones. (R) 3.55 BBC News.

BBC2 6.00 CBeebies. 7.00 CBBC. 8.30 CBeebies. 11.30 Animal Park. (R) 12.00 Daily Politics. 12.30 GMT with George Alagiah. 1.00 Due South. (R) 1.45 Car Booty. (R) 2.15 Ready Steady Cook. (R) 3.00 Murder, She Wrote. (R) 3.45 Flog It! Ten of the Best. 4.30 Pointless. (R) 5.15 The Hairy Bikers' Cook Off. 6.00 Celebrity Eggheads. 6.30 Strictly Come Dancing – It Takes Two. 7.00 Best of the Culture Show 2010. 8.00 Nigella Kitchen. 8.30 Rick Stein's Christmas Odyssey. 9.00 At Home with the Georgians. 10.00 Never Mind the Buzzcocks. 10.30 Newsnight; Weather. 11.20 Best of the Culture Show 2010. (R) 12.20 The Apprentice: You're Fired. 1.00 BBC News. 3.55 Close.

ITV1 6.00 Daybreak. 8.30 Lorraine. 9.25 The Jeremy Kyle Show. 10.30 This Morning. 12.30 Loose Women. 1.30 ITV News; Weather. 1.55 Regional News; Weather. 2.00 House Gift. 3.00 Dickinson's Real Deal. (R) 3.50 Regional Weather. 4.00 Midsomer Murders. (R) 5.00 The Alan Titchmarsh Show. 6.00 Regional News; Weather. 6.30 ITV News; Weather. 7.00 Emmerdale. 7.30 Christmas or Bust?: Tonight. 8.00 Emmerdale. 8.30 Coronation Street. 9.00 Celebrity Grimefighters. 10.00 ITV News at Ten; Weather. 10.30 Regional News; Weather. 10.35 Film: 2 Fast 2 Furious. (2003) Thriller sequel, with Paul Walker, Tyrese Gibson and Eva Mendes. 12.30 The Zone. 2.35 Surface. (R) 3.20 The Jeremy Kyle Show. (R) 4.10 ITV Nightscreen. 5.30 ITV Morning News.

Channel 4 6.10 Sail Mail. (R) 6.15 The Treade People. (R) 6.25 Planet Cook. (R) 6.45 Yo Gabba Gabba. (R) 7.10 Freshly Squeezed. 7.40 Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) 8.05 According to Jim. (R) 8.35 Frasier. (R) 9.05 One Tree Hill. 10.00 Friends. (R) 10.30 Friends. (R) 11.00 Glee. (R) 12.00 Channel 4 News Summary. 12.05 My Eden. (R) 12.10 River Cottage Bites. (R) 12.25 Iron Chef UK. 1.25 Film: Candleshoe. (1977) Disney comedy, starring Jodie Foster. 3.25 Countdown. 4.10 Deal or No Deal. 5.00 Come Dine with Me. 5.30 Four in a Bed. 6.00 The Simpsons. 6.30 Hollyoaks. 7.00 Channel 4 News. 7.55 4thought.tv. 8.00 The Million Pound Drop Live. 9.00 The House That Made Me. 10.00 Jamie's Christmas Lock-In. 11.05 Alan Carr: Chatty Man. (R) 12.10 Reaper. 1.00 Slow Joe. 1.10 Our Drugs War. (R) 2.05 Unreported World. (R) 2.35 Film: Antwone Fisher. (2002) Fact-based drama, directed by and starring Denzel Washington. 4.30 Film: The Spy in Black. (1939) Drama, starring Conrad Veidt and Valerie Hobson. 5.55 Brothers & Sisters. (R)

Channel Five 6.00 Milkshake! 9.15 The Wright Stuff. 10.45 Trisha Goddard. (R) 11.45 Five News. 11.50 CSI: NY. (R) 12.45 CSI: Crime Scene Investigation. (R) 1.45 Neighbours. 2.15 Home and Away. 2.45 Your Sport. 2.50 Magic in Moments. (R) 3.05 Film: Crazy for Christmas. (2005) 5.00 Five News; Weather. 5.30 Neighbours. (R) 6.00 Home and Away. (R) 6.25 Live from Studio Five. 7.00 Five News at 7. 7.30 Highland Emergency; Five News Update. 8.00 Demolition: The Super Stadium; Five News at 9. 9.00 NCIS. (R) 10.00 Law & Order: Criminal Intent. 10.55 Law & Order. (R) 11.55 Cops in Crisis. (R) 12.15 SuperCasino. 4.05 Divine Designs. (R) 4.30 Rough Guide to Bang for Your Buck. (R) 4.45 House Doctor. (R) 5.10 Michaela's Wild Challenge. (R)

Friday

BBC1 6.00 Breakfast. 9.15 Rip Off Britain. 10.00 Homes Under the Hammer. (R) BBC News; Weather. 11.00 Real Rescues. 11.45 To Buy or Not to Buy; BBC News; Weather. 12.15 Bargain Hunt. (R) 1.00 BBC News; Weather. 1.30 Regional News; Weather. 1.45 Doctors. 2.15 Escape to the Country. 3.00 BBC News; Weather; Regional News. 3.05 CBBC. 5.15 Weakest Link. 6.00 BBC News; Weather. 6.30 Regional News Programmes; Weather. 7.00 The One Show. 7.30 A Question of Sport. (R) BBC News; Regional News. 8.00 EastEnders. 8.30 QI. 9.00 Have I Got News for You. 9.30 Live at the Apollo. 10.00 BBC News. 10.25 Regional News; Weather. 10.35 The Graham Norton Show. 11.20 The National Lottery Friday Night Draws. 11.30 Film: Severance. (2006); Weatherview. 1.05 Sign Zone: The Normans. (R) 2.05 Horizon: What Happened Before the Big Bang? (R) 3.05 The Science of The Young Ones. (R) 3.50 BBC News.

BBC2 6.00 CBeebies. 7.00 CBBC. 8.30 CBeebies. 11.30 Animal Park. (R) 12.00 Daily Politics. 12.30 GMT with George Alagiah. 1.00 Due South. (R) 1.45 Car Booty. (R) 2.15 Ready Steady Cook. (R) 3.00 Murder, She Wrote. (R) 3.45 Flog It! Ten of the Best. 4.30 Pointless. (R) 5.15 The Hairy Bikers' Cook Off. 6.00 Celebrity Eggheads. 6.30 Strictly Come Dancing – It Takes Two. 7.30 Mastermind. 8.00 Natural World. 9.00 John Sergeant on Tracks of Empire. 10.00 Buzzcocks: The Doctor Who Special. (R) 10.30 Newsnight. 11.00 The Review Show; Weather. 12.05 Film: The Gigolos. (2006) 1.40 BBC News. 3.50 Close.

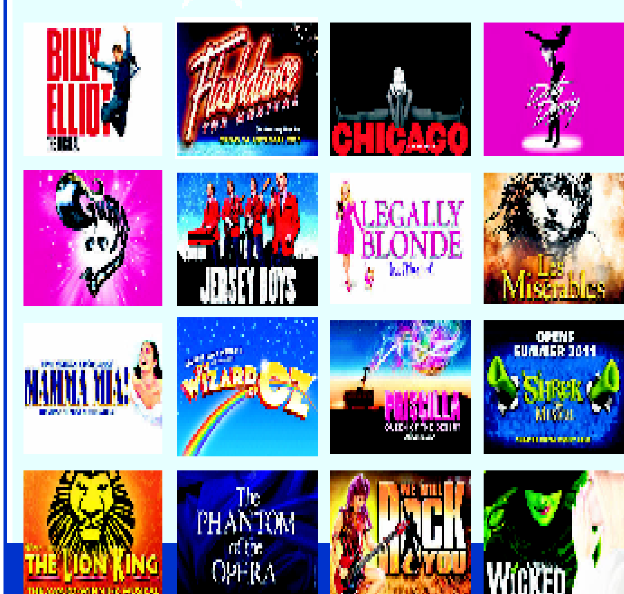
ITV1 6.00 Daybreak. 8.30 Lorraine. 9.25 The Jeremy Kyle Show. 10.30 This Morning. 12.30 Loose Women. 1.30 ITV News; Weather. 1.55 Regional News; Weather. 2.00 House Gift. 3.00 Dickinson's Real Deal. (R) 3.50 Regional Weather. 4.00 Midsomer Murders. (R) 5.00 The Alan Titchmarsh Show. 6.00 Regional News; Weather. 6.30 ITV News; Weather. 7.00 Emmerdale. 7.30 Coronation Street. 8.00 Countrywise Kitchen. 8.30 Coronation Street. 9.00 A Night of Heroes: The Military Awards 2010. 10.30 ITV News; Weather. 11.00 Regional News; Weather. 11.05 Film: Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome. (1985) 1.00 The Zone; ITV News Headlines. 3.05 Film: On Deadly Ground. (1994) 4.45 ITV Nightscreen. 5.30 ITV Morning News.

Channel 4 6.40 The Treade People. (R) 6.50 Yo Gabba Gabba. (R) 7.15 Freshly Squeezed. 7.45 Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) 8.10 According to Jim. (R) 8.35 Frasier. (R) 9.05 One Tree Hill. 10.00 Friends. (R) 10.30 Friends. (R) 11.00 Glee. (R) 12.00 Channel 4 News Summary. 12.05 River Cottage Bites. (R) 12.20 Iron Chef UK. 1.20 Film: Ivanhoe. (1952) Medieval adventure, starring Robert Taylor. 3.25 Countdown. 4.10 Deal or No Deal. 5.00 Come Dine with Me. 5.30 Four in a Bed. 6.00 The Simpsons. 6.30 Hollyoaks. 7.00 Channel 4 News. 7.25 4thought.tv. 7.30 Teen Undertaker. (R) 8.00 The Million Pound Drop Live. 9.00 The Event: President Martinez Is Blackmailed. 10.00 Peep Show. 10.30 Robert's Web. 11.05 Frankie Boyle's Tramadol Nights. (R) 11.40 The Morgana Show. (R) 12.15 Hollyoaks. (R) 1.15 Music on 4: Mercury Prize Sessions: Chapel Club. 1.30 Music on 4: Live at Russian Standard Originals. 1.40 This Week's 4Music Top 20. 3.30 Brothers & Sisters. (R) 4.15 ER. (R) 5.00 One Tree Hill.

Channel Five 6.00 Milkshake! 9.15 The Wright Stuff. 10.45 Trisha Goddard. (R) 11.45 Five News. 11.50 CSI: Crime Scene Investigation. (R) 12.45 CSI: Crime Scene Investigation. (R) 1.45 Neighbours. 2.15 Home and Away. 2.50 Your Sport. 2.55 Magic in Moments. (R) 3.10 Film: I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus. (2002) Family comedy, starring Connie Sellecca. 5.00 Five News; Weather. 5.30 Neighbours. (R) 6.00 Home and Away. (R) 6.25 Live from Studio Five. 7.00 Five News at 7. 7.30 Zoo Days. (R) Five News Update. 8.00 Emergency Bikers; Five News at 9. 9.00 The Mentalist. 10.00 Law & Order: Special Victims Unit. 10.55 Law & Order: Special Victims Unit. 11.55 Cops in Crisis. (R) 12.15 SuperCasino. 4.05 Motorsport Mundial. 4.30 Street Market Chefs. (R) 4.55 Rough Guide to Islands. (R) 5.10 Michaela's Wild Challenge. (R)

star extra TRAVEL

London Theatre Breaks



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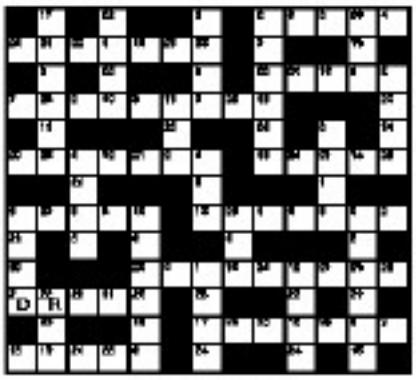
Brain Gym

No.094

Codeword

Each number in the grid represents a different letter of the alphabet and every letter of the alphabet is used. Use the given letter(s) to the right of the main grid to start you off.



LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION

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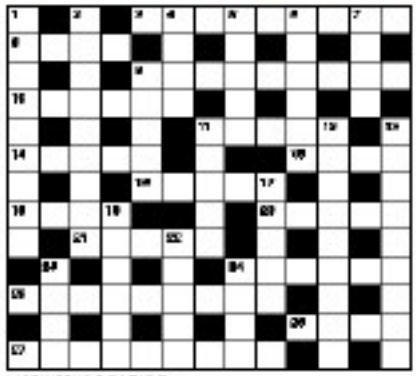
Double Crossword

Choose either grid or cryptic clues – both lead to the same grid.



Cryptic Clues:

Across

9. Cockles mainly go on producing (8,4)
6. Alarm drains plains (4)
8. Tramp then are room are being (9)
10. His introduction is later (9)
11. Out from for and stupidity (5)
12. Meaning gives salary (5)
15. Fall in love using ingrid (4)
16. One of a group of people in kent (5)
18. Sound enrolling (5)
20. Case you fifty dirt cylinders simple (5)
21. Rivals be displayed to a future author (3)
24. The company joining kg moron is a forward but (7)
26. Act on a stamen early (6,3)
28. It's a rapid up carbon cutting (4)
29. Kitten problem lost letter (3)

Down

1. Harrow – on our direction and (4,3)
2. In which the information is in a measure (5,5)
4. Dealer in stolen rich locations (4)
5. Presumably there's a sound reason for it (7)
8. They out waving figures (7)
7. The character in the clutch (4)
9. Hold warm in some nine nights holiday? (8)
11. Wandering being rich is kept (5)
12. Is it wise to travel in light of a rod (4,7)
13. Hesitation one orbit and finds girl brothers (8)
17. A boor return to obscurity (7)
19. Holy cow in mary? (6)
20. He rain is tax (pay in cash) (5)
22. Half hatred is fashions (4)
23. Italian orchestra goes to a stall or for unsettling sea level (4)

Quick Clues:

Across

9. Acceptance lying (6)
9. Cricketers in the drawn (4)
9. Jammed (5)
10. Plan (6)
11. Protection (5)
14. Course (7)
14. Tou (4)
16. Not heavy (5)
18. Chilly juice (4)
20. Wash (illing (7)
21. Hobbits, rainbow (6)
24. Immoral (4)
25. Suicide fin (5)
26. Omega (4)
27. Thrilling (endless (6)

Down

1. Impossibly (9)
2. Provocative (6)
4. Nimbly (4)
6. Water (9)
8. Deception (4)
7. Dinosaur (4)
9. Ring (5)
11. Ow (5)
12. Provoking (9)
15. Incorrectly (5,2,4)
17. Stolen (6)
19. Valley (4)
22. Gifts (illing (7)
23. Through (4)
24. Later (4)

Sudoku

Fill in the grid below so that every column, every row and each of the 3x3 boxes contains all the digits from 1 to 9.

		9	4				3	
2	6	4	9					
				5				4
9	5	1				7		6
	7			6				
4		6			8	1	2	5
1				8				
	2	5			9	4	1	3
					6	8		

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION

Circlegram

Replace the question mark with a letter so that hollows within each circle can be rearranged to form words with a common theme. When up to three words, use the letter in parenthesis by the question mark!

Solution in next week's edition.

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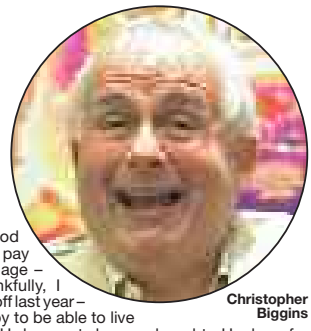


Christopher Biggins

Christopher Biggins talks to LEON BURAKOWSKI about panto, Porridge and paying the mortgage

ONE of Britain's best loved celebrities, Christopher Biggins, is promising Wolverhampton a spectacular Grand pantomime this winter.

The actor and reality TV star is a veteran of 39 pantos but reckons Aladdin, which opens at the Grand on Saturday, could be the best yet.

"It is what I call a good old-fashioned London Palladium pantomime and what I mean by that is we have unbelievable scenery. I have been doing pantomine for 38 years and I haven't done one with scenery like this, with costumes that are so lavish and an amazing cast."

The show is a tweaked version of the production of Aladdin that broke box office records in Plymouth last year, in which veteran dame Biggins again played Widow Twankey.

"Everyone we did the panto with last year is coming back except for Aladdin and Wishee-Washee and we have put those roles together and have the amazing ventriloquist Paul Zerdin. He is brilliant. And we have a 3D genie... oh yes we do!" Cue familiar booming laugh.

"When I saw it in rehearsal I was absolutely blown away. It cost a lot of money and the running costs are huge for it. When Abanazar and Aladdin are in the cave with this extraordinary genie, you can see the kids trying to catch the spiders. It is phenomenal.

"It is going to be a spectacular pantomime, one of the most spectacular Wolverhampton has staged."

Biggins also has a key role in the region's other big pantomime this winter but not on stage... it was he who encouraged his close friend Joan Collins to make her panto debut this year, playing Queen Rat in Dick Whittington at Birmingham Hippodrome.

"We were talking about the fact a job had fallen through over Christmas and New Year and I said come on Joan why don't you do a pantomime. I told her she would be great. I think I sowed the seed.

"Sadly, I don't think I will be able to see her perform but I know she's going to be fantastic. We will get together for dinner on our night off."

But another one of his celebrity pals will be calling in at the Grand for one of the performances.

Career

"Cilla (Black) will be coming to Wolverhampton because she is not doing a pantomime herself this year," said the star, whose early roles included such TV classics as the drama I, Claudius, and prison sitcom Porridge with Ronnie Barker.

"I am very lucky, I have a very varied, interesting and good career. I loved Nero in I, Claudius, and Ozzy Whitworth in Poldark from my straight acting years. I loved Surprise Surprise with Cilla, I'm A Celebrity Get Me Out Of Here and Come Dine With Me. As long as I can plod along and pay the mortgage – well, thankfully, I paid that off last year – I am happy to be able to live a full life." He loves art - he once bought a Hockney for £150 that's now worth £10,000 – and technology, his most treasured possession is his iPhone, he says, and he enjoys holidays in Mauritius.

But he always makes sure he is available for the panto season.

"I love the audience participation and I love to make an audience laugh and that it is for everyone, from three to 93.

"When I did the 'Jungle' I didn't do a pantomime that year, so I went and saw 15 pantomimes. I went all over the country. It was wonderful."

Aladdin is staged at the Grand from December 11 to January 30.

Glenn communing with the Black Country

From left, Glenn Hughes with Jason Bonham on drums and Joe Bonamassa

GOOD news for fans of Anglo-American rock supergroup Black Country Communion - who perform their debut UK gig at Wolverhampton Civic Hall on December 29 – frontman Glenn Hughes is already working on songs for their second album.

The former Deep Purple and Trapeze singer, who hails from Cannock, revealed that BCC is no 'one-off' project when talking to The Chronicle from his hillside home in sunny California, which he shares with wife Gabrielle. "I love England but not the cold and the rain," he admitted.

The band features Hughes on vocals and bass guitar, drummer Jason Bonham, the Dudley-born son of the late Led Zeppelin sticksman John Bonham, with Americans – guitarist Joe Bonamassa and keyboardist Derek Sherinian. Their self-titled debut album – a slab of classic bluesy hard rock – has been a big success.

"I have prepared a lot of songs, we've probably got three-quarters of the next album," said Glenn. "Joe (Bonamassa) and Kevin (Shirley, the producer) both live in LA and we get together at Kevin's studio in Malibu. It's very cohesive and organic. I bring my songs, Joe brings his and we finish each other's songs. I have a studio at home and sometimes I have to remind myself to get out of there," said Glenn, a former rock wildman who has cleaned up his act.

Thankful

"Songwriting is what I do and I do it every day, even on Christmas Day. I am known as a rock singer, and I appreciate and am thankful for that but primarily I am a songwriter. Those creative urges get stronger the further I get from the days when I would get high or drunk."

He reckons it's fate that has brought the four of them together in a band after years of friendship, a lifetime's worth when it comes to Jason Bonham.

"I knew Jason before he knew me," said Glenn. "I remember when he was a two-year-old, John (his father) was a friend of mine and I was like an uncle to Jason. He's my friend's son and I love him to bits.

"I believe in fate and in karma. I had a dream which told me I was going to be in a rock 'n' roll band again. I was all set to make another funky Glenn record but I put the brakes on... and three weeks later I'm in this band Black Country Communion."

The name references Glenn and Jason's roots in the West Midlands.

"It was very important to me and to Jason that the first gig be at Wolverhampton Civic Hall. That really means something to us. It's a great rock venue in the heart of the Black Country. We've got to play where the name came from.

"I've played the venue about ten times but not in recent years. I played there with my first band The News in 1968, then in '69 with Finders Keepers, then several times with Trapeze and then with Deep Purple a couple of times." Just before heading down the canyon to record at Malibu, Glenn signed off with a cheery "Up the Wolves!"

BOOKS thechronicle

Trek to the stars with new guides

WATCHERS of the heavens will – clouds and fog permitting – be treated to some exceptional sights in the night sky this winter, especially the early risers.

There is a total lunar eclipse around dawn on December 21 and just before dawn on January 4 the Quadrantids meteor shower will be at its peak, and in a rare two-for-the-price-of-one deal from nature, there will be a partial eclipse of the rising sun that morning.

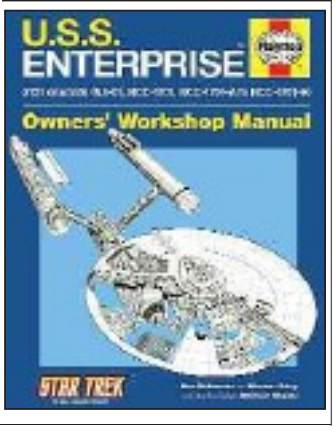
Then on the night of January 4 telescopes and binoculars will be aimed towards Jupiter which will be very close to the planet Uranus, positioned just to the north of it.

Any youngster or a beginner of any age who wishes to learn more about astronomy should check out the Haynes **Astronomy Manual, A Practical Guide To The Night Sky (hardback, £19.99)** by Jane A Green, an outstanding amateur astronomer who used to be an officer on cruise ships.

Her book features a foreword by astronomer and star rock guitarist Dr Brian May and an introduction by Sir Patrick Moore, presenter of BBCTV's long-running The Sky At Night.

It is a richly illustrated book that will ease the beginner into the wonders of the cosmos and how to observe and picture them, without ever being patronising.

The stats are mind-blowing and perhaps best summed up by Green when she says there are more stars 'out there' than all the grains of sands on all the beaches on this planet.



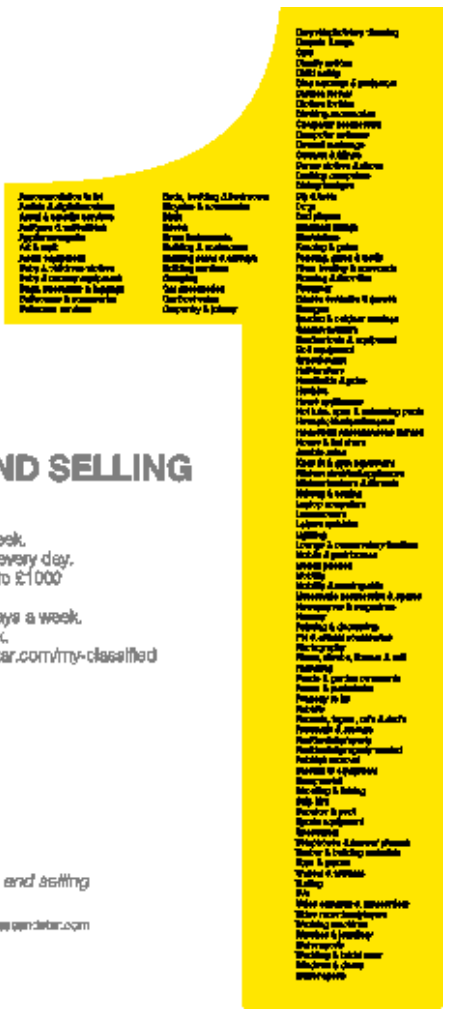
Enterprise

For those who like to spice up their science fact with a lot of exciting science fiction, Haynes have also brought their meticulous style to the Star Trek universe with the publication of **The USS Enterprise Owner's Workshop Manual (hardback, £19.99)**.

Those familiar with Haynes' auto manuals will know what to expect, except that here is something with a bit more poke than a Ford Capri or even a Jaguar XJS (both manuals are available), a warp-speed intergalactic starship, covering seven incarnations of the iconic craft from 2151 onwards.

The manual features more than 80 new cutaway views of the starship plus lots of diagrams and details on the key technologies involved. Wonderfully detailed and absorbing escapist fun for all Trekkies.

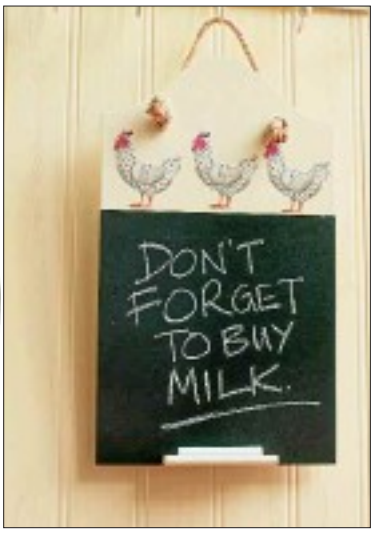
Leon Burakowski



Chalk up success with that festive gift dilemma

Mini Trio of Tabletop Games
Perfect for get-togethers: Sixty Seconds gives players one minute to wax lyrical about a subject without pausing or repeating themselves; Who Am I? is a famous-person guessing game and Word Bluff a version of the classic TV show.
Ref 42397 (approx. 50 double-sided cards in each box) Price: £6.99

IT'S only November so no need to panic yet but we all have that annoying friend who announces that she has not only bought all her Christmas presents but has already wrapped them and hidden them away. You can go off people!
One way to wipe that smile of their face to go one better and do your shopping from the comfort of your armchair, either by catalogue or online and then just wait until it is delivered to your door. Who wants to lug back heavy bags after fighting through queues of shoppers. Yes, there may be some late bargains but is it worth the hassle?
And there's one catalogue that covers all categories, male, female, cooking, home, decorations etc. Check out these ideas from Lakeland.
For more information go to www.lakeland.co.uk or call 015394 88100.



Hens Chalkboard
Handmade and hand-decorated. Put together in a little workshop at the bottom of a Lincolnshire garden this helpful board is a winner and will make sure you always remember what to put on your shopping list. It has rustic charm with its rope hanger and spotted hens.
Ref 22859 23 x 40cm (9ins x 15¾ins) Price: £19.99

Olive Oil Can
A touch of the Mediterranean. This olive oil can will bring rustic appeal to a shelf or on the worktop and the thin spout gives precise control for pouring out. Hand-finished stainless steel.
Ref 42654 17cm (6¾ ins)
Price: £10.99

Votive candles
These create a magical atmosphere at Christmas gatherings, so enjoy the flicker of these pretty little versions. They use battery-operated LEDs hidden inside –a safe alternative to traditional tea lights.
4 LED Votives.
Ref:41696 Price: £12.99

Pewter Puss Ring Minder
It's so annoying when you can't find your rings. Keep them safe on this lovely ring minder. A great gift for a cat-loving friend.
Ref 41761 10cm (4ins)
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Umbra Partridge Jewellery Tree
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Ref 41948 30cm (12ins)
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A lot of importance is placed these days on well-kept eyebrows so this pair of illuminating tweezers should come in very handy.
They are crafted from fine stainless steel with perfectly aligned tips so you can see every single hair and they are LED-lit too.
Turn on the ultra-bright light and with the help of the magnifying mirror in the carry case, you'll be able to achieve beautiful brows.
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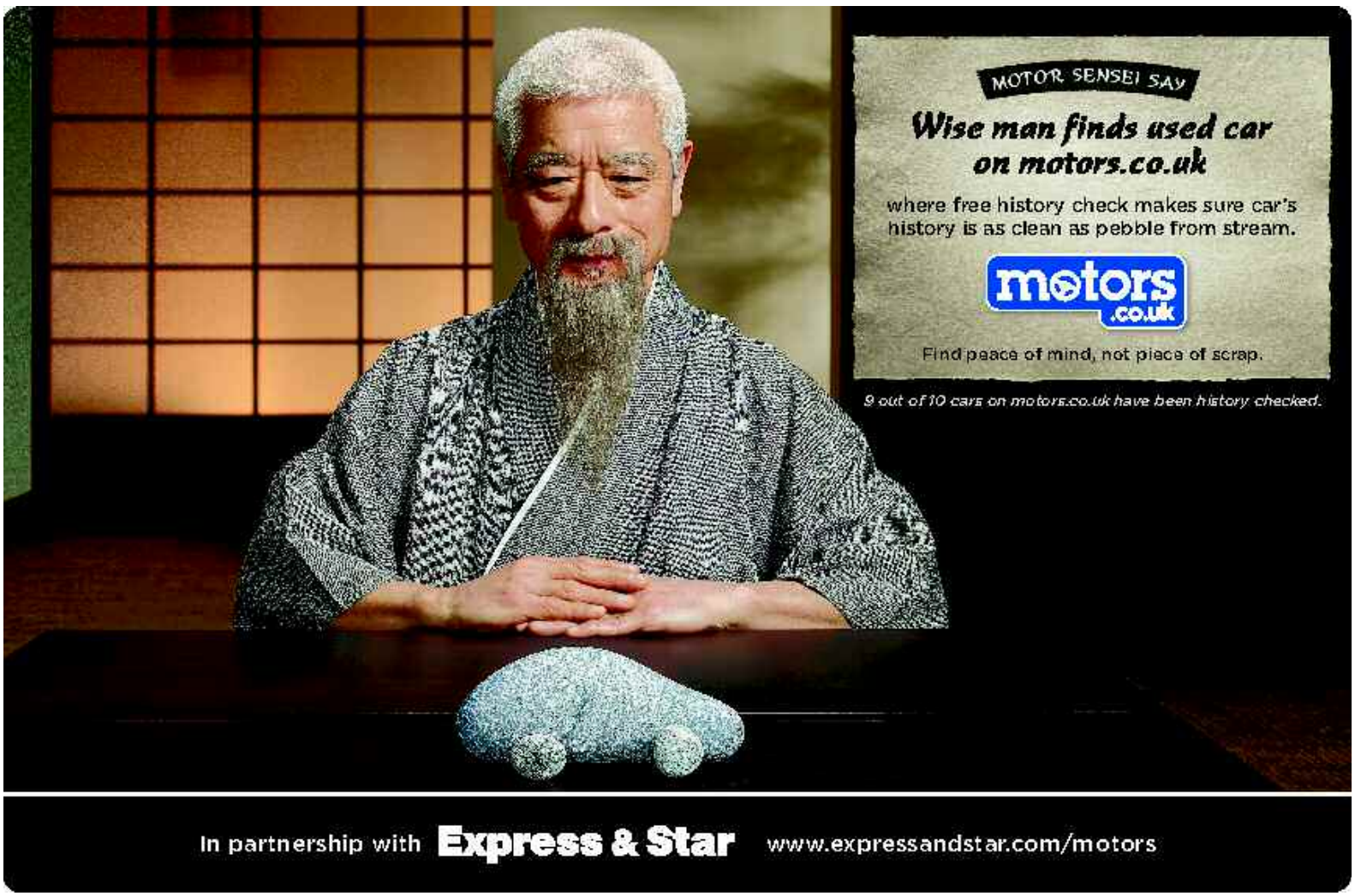
Fancy a loyal pet? This Dalmatian Doorstop will faithfully hold doors open and keep draughts out to save on energy bills. Guaranteed to make your home more cosy and a favourite with the young ones. Being a very obedient dog, he will 'lie down' exactly where you'd like him to. Finished in a soft faux suede fabric.
Ref 42387 84cm (L: 33ins) Price: £22.99



The new Ford C-Max, above, and Grand C-Max have been awarded top marks for safety features

New Ford family car earns five-star rating

THE all-new Ford C-Max and Grand C-Max models have been awarded the maximum five-star safety ratings by the independent Euro NCAP organisation.

The pair of 'multi-activity vehicles', which went on sale in the UK this month, achieved the highest score recorded for whiplash protection and excelled in both adult occupant and child occupant safety categories.

Ford C-Max and Grand C-Max are built on Ford's global C-car platform and are the first Ford passenger cars to undergo Euro NCAP's new crash test procedures introduced last year.

Gunnar Herrmann, Ford's global medium car vehicle line director, said: "Crash test ratings are an important factor when designing and engineering our vehicles and we're delighted that Euro NCAP has recognised that both the new C-Max and Grand C-Max models offer excellent protection in the event of a collision.

"These are the first vehicles to be built on our new global C-car platform and for them to score so highly bodes well for future products including the all-new Focus which goes on sale next year."

Both new C-Max and Grand C-Max feature Ford's Intelligent Protection System (IPS) which marries a high-strength body structure with state-of-the-art restraint systems.

Generation

In total, 53 per cent of the body shell in each vehicle is made from high-strength steels, compared to 45 per cent in the previous generation vehicle. Ultra-tough Boron steel is used in the A-pillars, B-pillars, rocker panels and door reinforcement beams help to create a passenger cell that manages deformation in a crash – including frontal impacts, side impacts and side pole impacts. High strength dual-phase steel is used in the front crash structure, inner rocker panels and floor cross members for maximum crash energy absorption, and to manage deformation of the passenger cell.

C-Max and Grand C-Max also feature a front chassis subframe designed to de-couple from the lower body in a frontal collision, reducing deformation in the passenger cell footwell area.

A key feature of Ford's Intelligent Protection System restraint system for the C-Max and Grand C-Max is individual single stage front airbags and side thorax airbags for the driver and front passenger, plus standard side curtain airbags for the first and second row seats.

Driver safety is improved thanks to Ford's new steering column that reduces loads on the occupant's head and chest by moving away from the driver in high speed frontal impacts.

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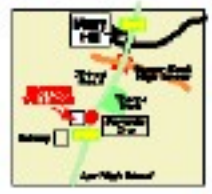

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Refreshed Honda Jazz promises better handling, ride comfort and new Hybrid model

Supermini to get jazzed up

The styling of the Jazz has been freshened up with new bumpers, helping to make it more aerodynamically efficient

The load area of the new Jazz Hybrid

Its 'magic seats' are renowned for their flexibility

THE popular Jazz supermini from Honda has been given a refresh for 2011, with a range of enhancements to both looks and driving dynamics.

The revised Jazz range, which will include a hybrid model, goes on sale in the UK on February 1, 2011, with prices starting from £11,295 for the 1.2 S model and £15,995 for the Hybrid variant in HE trim.

The challenge for Honda's engineers was to freshen and improve the car without compromising on the characteristics that make the Jazz so popular.

But by enhancing the car's strongest qualities, Honda has taken the Jazz on to the next stage.

Staff have produced a car with greater flexibility, better looks, increased ride comfort and improved environmental credentials.

While the 2011 car is just as cleverly packaged, fresh styling gives the Jazz a new appearance.

New front and rear bumpers are the main parts to have influenced the look of the car.

Airflow

These have also been designed to reduce drag as the airflow passes over the Jazz's body and to avoid turbulence when the airflow detaches from the rear.

These styling improvements aid aerodynamic efficiency on all Jazz models.

Constantly variable transmission, more commonly known as "CVT", first appeared in the previous Jazz range and due to overwhelming customer demand Honda has brought it back along with a few clever improvements.

The CVT is an automatic transmission that keeps the engine in a rev range where the car is most efficient.

As well as ensuring the whole power train of the Jazz is more efficient, it also offers the driver a smooth and effortless journey.

The CVT transmission is a standard feature on the Hybrid and an option on 1.4 litre petrol models where, thanks to the improvements, it now matches the economy and emissions of the outgoing Jazz i-SHIFT, with a CO_2 value of 125g/km.

Leather upholstery makes a very welcome appearance for the first time in the Jazz range.

Along with the addition of chrome rings defining the air vents, instruments and climate controls across the dashboard, the leather trim gives a whole new premium feeling to the interior of the car.

That can be an important option for customers downsizing from larger vehicles from other sectors.

Leather seats are standard on the Jazz Hybrid in HX trim and available as a £1,250 option on the 1.4-litre petrol EX model.

Another change across the range is a new darker dashboard material which contrasts strongly with the orange and blue back lighting of the dials, gauges and displays across the dashboard.

The orange backlighting colour is unique to the petrol powered variants, while the Hybrid version uses the blue lighting to differentiate the model from the rest of the range.

The "magic seats", famed for their flexibility and multiple seating and cargo-carrying configurations – are now even better with the addition of a reclining rear seat.

The rear seats can now recline 73mms to increase rear passenger comfort.

The established 1.2-litre and best-selling 1.4-litre i-VTEC petrol engines remain in the Jazz range and to compliment the launch of the Hybrid variant, these two petrol engines have benefited from some small reductions in CO_2 values and improved fuel economy.

The 1.4-litre manual variant with manual transmission has emissions starting at 126 g/km down from 128 g/km and uses 51.4mpg on the combined cycle.

The fuel sipping 1.2 litre engine uses 53.3mpg and also drops two grams of CO_2 to 123g/km.

Suspension

The Jazz Hybrid is an ultra-efficient car with a combined fuel consumption figure of 62.8 mpg.

Its CO_2 output of just 104g/km makes the Jazz Hybrid the lowest of any automatic car in the B-segment.

The suspension on the 2011 Jazz features revised settings to increase ride comfort and improve handling.

Already well respected for its lightness and manoeuvrability around town, the Jazz benefits from improvements to steering feel at higher speeds.

Thanks to this continuous improvement the revised model has a much firmer, positive steering feel as speeds increase to inspire a confident driving experience.

All Jazz models, including the Hybrid version, share new sleek, projector style headlights adding to the sportier look.

There are four new colours available across the petrol range – with a further two exclusive to the Hybrid models: Lime green metallic and taffeta white.

The 2011 prices range from £11,295 for the 1.2 S to £17,995 for the flagship Hybrid HX.

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sport

Ann ends year with a swing

KIDDERMINSTER Golf Club Ladies' section finished off their year with the General Meeting last Wednesday.

The outgoing captain, Ann Billingham, said it had been a great honour to hold the position with the club and that she had really enjoyed her year.

She said that it had been an experience that she would remember proudly and thanked all the members who made it such a pleasure to play at Kidderminster.

She thanked all the ladies, and men, for their help and support throughout the year. During the year the ladies raised more than £2,000 for the captain's charity, The British Heart Foundation.

The ladies also collected toys for disadvantaged children in Kidderminster, distributed through the Salvation Army, and held a bridge drive which raised more than £650 for the captain's charity.

Ann said that incoming captain, Maureen Brewer, was committed to the club. She wished her all the best for the coming year.

Glassboys off again

THE Glassboys Red Insure Cup 2nd Round tie at Cinderford was postponed for a second time on Tuesday night.

The match has been re-arranged for Tuesday, 7.45pm kick-off.

This means Tuesday's scheduled league game at home to Hemel Hempstead will now take place on an alternative date yet to be confirmed.

Stourbridge have been drawn away at Blue Square Bet North outfit Redditch United in the semi-finals of the Worcestershire Senior Cup.

The tie has provisonally been arranged for Tuesday, 15th February (7.45pm).

In the other semi-final, the winners of the first round clash between Halesowen Town and Stourport Swifts will be at home to Worcester City.

Laura Saich

Laura is jumping with joy

MEMBERS of Stourport Trampoline Club have done themselves proud in the last three competitions of the year.

And among those doing well was 13--year-old Laura Saich, who represented Hagley Roman Catholic School, at the West Midlands Schools Competition, Birmingham.

Their team performance was good enough to get them through to the Central England and Wales competition to be held in Cardiff next year.

She will be joined there by 12-year-old Taymar Pearce-Mason, who represented The Chantry High School, Martley, Worcestershire.

She had an amazing competition in which she had a huge lead after her 1st routine.

Her 2nd routine was also performed well with good form and the highest difficulty score to gain her 1st place.

Taymar also gained fourth place at the West Midlands Closed Age Groups, Coventry, which attracts the region's best performers in their age group.

Young race ace Dean gets chance at wheel of F1 car

A RACING driver from Wolverhampton has launched his Formula One career off the starting grid after putting a McLaren Mercedes through its paces at the home of British racing, Silverstone.

Not only did former Dudley student Dean Smith, aged 22, realise a lifelong ambition during the 18-lap stint, he also thoroughly impressed the watching McLaren management.

Dean was said to have delivered an assured performance on his big debut and now plans to knuckle down in the feeder GP3 series in order to win a permanent place on the F1 circuit.

He earned the opportunity to test with McLaren by winning the Autosport BRDC award in 2009. The title recognises young racing talent in the UK and previous winners have included F1 stars David Coulthard, Anthony Davidson and Jenson Button.

Last year Dean, a former student at Ellowes Hall Sports College, Dudley, won the Formula Renault championship and he was Formula BMW champion in 2005. Dean said his test session in a MP4-23 McLaren Mercedes – the car raced in the 2008 F1 World Championship - had made him hungrier than ever to fight his way to the pinnacle of motor racing.

"Driving a Formula One car is something I've wanted to do all my life and to have actually achieved that aim, thanks to everyone at Vodafone McLaren Mercedes and the McLaren Autosport BRDC Award, really is a dream come true," he said.

"When I went out on track for the first time it was pretty wet but that wasn't a problem, everything felt very comfortable and quite natural actually.

"The McLaren Mercedes is absolutely awesome. I feel so privileged to have had the opportunity to test the car. "I'm really pleased with the job I did and the team told me how impressed they were too so it couldn't have gone any better."

Dean is now looking for sponsorship to help him compete in GP3 again next year after finishing seventh in this year's championship – the highest placed Briton. He added: "Now I've shown what I can do in an F1 car, it's more vital than ever to attract the sponsorship and investment we need."

Dean Smith in the F1 car as he shows his skills at Silverstone and, right, all smiles afterwards

Flu takes toll on champ as he loses title defence

STOURBRIDGE'S Kevin McCauley was dethroned as Midlands champion after a close points call went against him at Coventry's Hilton Hotel.

McCauley was demanding a rematch by the time he got to the dressing room after Sean McKervey's hand was raised at the final bell on Saturday night.

That followed the outgoing champion slicing open his challenger after a barrage of shots in the third round, which left McKervey with five stitches and a perforated eardrum.

A bruising battle went against the West Midlands fighter, who struggled in the later rounds with endurance.

That was because McCauley had been struck down with flu the day before fight night, which told as the pace was upped in key periods of the contest.

The snap in his punches deserted him in the final three rounds with McKervey the busier despite his injury.

Avenge

Referee John Keane had the doctor up on the mat twice during the contest and it didn't seem the fight would go the distance, but the challenger dug it out to rip the belt from his grasp.

It was a contentious point call, one that McCauley thought the referee was swayed into making by the crowd.

He said: "I gave him the shot days after I won the title, hopefully he will give me a rematch in the same time frame.

"I thought I had done enough to keep the belt, I have got to be honest."

But the 31-year-old has vowed to be ready to go again in the New Year and hopes to have the chance to avenge defeat.

He said: "I wasn't well on the night and it's dreadful luck, getting struck down with flu the day before a fight is as bad as it gets.

"But I am a fighter, I have come through worse and if the rematch doesn't come off it will only because he doesn't want it.

"I will fight anyone, anytime if it's right."

Ding-dong contest for Dean

DUDLEY'S Dean Anderson, who came through a brutal six-rounder against debutant Chuck Jones at featherweight at Birmingham's Holiday Inn on Monday.

Anderson is now two unbeaten since his debut last month and expects to be back in the ring in February.

Getting a kick out of success

A MARTIAL arts club from Cradley Heath gave a five-star performance at a recent tournament in Germany.

Charlesworth Martial Arts took five fighters to the competition which featured 17 countries and some of Europe's top kickboxing teams. Kicking off the medal tally was 13-year-old Holly O'Connor, who travels from Gloucester to train three times a week at Charlesworth.

Kyeran Cox, aged 17 from Stourbridge and 14-year-old Weston Bogle, from Old Hill, represented England in a six-hour long team battle. They beat current the World Karate and Kickboxing Association German national team champions on their way to a third-place finish.

Next on the medal rostrum was Reuben Charlesworth, aged 13 and from Lower Gornal. He has made a name for himself by winning many European titles and looks to be following in the footsteps of his four-time World Champion mum, Julie.

Weston claimed an individual title, despite picking up an injury during the team battle and having to carry on with one arm. Jason Charlesworth, who runs the club, said: "Weston showed skill and grace to defeat all that attempted to beat him. He is so talented; even with his injury I knew he would win."

Kyeran, also struggling from the team fights, later discovered he had broken a bone in his foot, but still managed to see off competitors to win his category.

Last but not least came 17-year-old Holly Halls student Tara Billingham, who had pressure on her after enjoying a year that any top athlete would be proud of.

Opponents tried every trick in the book but she listened to her coach and overwhelmed the 500 crowd with her flamboyant nature and sharp awareness to win.

Anyone who wants to join the club should contact Jason on 07889 627929 or 01384 356805.

Star kickbox performers, from left: Weston Bogle,Reuben Charlesworth, Holly O'Conner, Tara Billingham, Holly O'Conner and Kyeran Cox

Strength in depth display by girls

THE Bev Price Team Championships, held annually by Kidderminster's Samurai Judo Club at Walsall Sport Campus, remains Britain's premier judo team, competition.

As usual there were strong teams from all over the country, but the Samurai's own teams held their own, coming away with a gold and two bronzes.

Hamish Beaumont won all four of his contests with maximum points.

In the girls, Darcie Hancocks had four good wins and there were some good wins from Bryony Griffiths, but they ended up losing narrowly for the bronze, 2-1.

Strong

The current strength in depth in the Samurai girls meant both teams in the heavyweights were strong contenders.

The Two Gorillas and a Monkey team of the light but brave Bryony Griffiths and Jade Farrell and Rachel Moon and Frankie's Monsters, with Frankie Marston, Jodie Caller and Sally Moon met in the semi-finals, which Frankie's won.

They went on to take gold and Gorillas the bronze.

The senior men's section is always extremely tough. The Samurai fielded two teams.

The Samurai fielded two women's teams, Gemma O'Dowd, Kate Walker and Sally Moon and sisters Charis and Millie Hancocks alongside Rachel Moon.

The first team went through to the semi-finals, which they lost but came back to take the bronze medal.

Back from brink to joint top spot

MEET Halas Hawks under-13 girls have bounced back from the verge of extinction to be joint top of their division in the Stourbridge and District League.

The team was about to fold at the end of last season because it had no manager. But members of the Halas Hawks committee Pauline Hickman, Kevin Weston, Steve Wem and Tracey Adderley stepped in to take the reins and the team has subsequently gone from strength to strength.

The girls are: Sophie Blount, Sophie Pritchard, Danielle Dudson, Chelsea Dudson, Ciara Robinson-Morris, Olivia Tandy, Mia Bell, Chelsea Beamer, Megan Hipkiss, Chloe Gorton, Kimberley Gorton and Gina Goode.

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